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TRUE TO HIM EVER

A NOVEL.

BY

F. W. Rankin

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Dedicated

TO

THOSE BRAVE HEARTS,

WHO, EVER TRUE,

ARE GIRDED WITH A HOLY

"EARNESTNESS,"

EMBOLDENING THEM TO MEET THE DARKEST HOUR WITH SILENT FORTITUDE,

FOR

"Must not Earth be Rent before her Gems are Found?"

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TRUE TO HIM EVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVITATION.

IT was a hot, sultry morning in August, when Tom Clayton, a fine-looking young fellow of twenty four or five, hurried down Wall Street, holding in one hand an open silk umbrella, and in the other his straw hat, with which he energetically fanned his flushed face. With a bright smile and a good-natured word for every one who accosted him, he jostled past the crowds that surge up and down that busy street at noon-time, and stopping at No.—, rushed up-stairs two steps at a time, and burst into his friend's office, exclaiming:

"Hollo, Graham! Busy as ever, I see. I'm off for Seabright, so good-by to red tape and law for a brief season. Come, pack up your traps and go with me, can you not?"

The blinds were closely drawn to shut out the fierce heat and glare of the noonday sun, which

poured its burning rays on the hot brick walls and heated pavement of Wall Street. The cool, soft breezes from the bay, laden with invigorating saltness and refreshing moisture from the ocean—such a blessing to the lower streets and crowded thoroughfares of our great metropolis—now crept languidly in through the closed shutters, its moisture dried up by the scorching heat, rendering the atmosphere more sultry and stifling than ever.

A tall, handsome man of thirty sat by an office table busily writing; papers and documents were scattered about in the dire confusion peculiar to masculine ideas of order, and, to a casual observer, this promiscuous arrangement and confused appearance of things would seem but a sorry exemplification of Heaven's first law. Yet to the busy writer before the table, every precept and letter of that law were literally carried out, there being a place for everything and everything being in its place, notwithstanding the disorder which apparently prevailed. Half hidden by a pile of letters, lay a bunch of withered rose-buds, purchased that morning from the pretty little flower-girl, who dispenses her floral treasure under the shadow of old Trinity; there they lay, faded and forgotten by their owner, whose rapid pen flew over the page before him. A tired, careworn look rested on his fine features, which lightened into a bright smile of welcome as Clayton entered in his usual unceremonious fashion. Shaking his hand cordially, Graham gave him a chair by the window, saying:

"Why, where did you drop from? I thought you were at Champlain, visiting those pretty cousins of yours."

"I did expect to be up there by this time, but was detained in town by Kingsland, who wanted me on business," replied Clayton, tilting back in his chair with his feet on the window sill. "I received a letter from Uncle Ralph this morning, inviting me to spend a week or two with the family at Seabright, so I shall postpone my visit to Champlain until Christmas."

"Seabright! And pray where may that be?"

"I don't wonder you ask, for though so 'near, it is so far,' at least to the acquaintance of New Yorkers in general. It is a barren, isolated little nook of a place, about five miles from Long Branch, and consists of a few houses and a small hotel, surrounded by a wilderness of sand; but old ocean laps the shore with his briny wave within a stone's throw of the cottage Uncle Ralph has rented, and sea-nymphs and sirens haunt the beach with their luring spells, and fill the breezes with the witchery of their song."

"This hot weather does not appear to affect your poetic vein much," said Graham, with a laugh. "You seem to be higher than ever on your stilts, your 'eye in fine frenzy rolling,' etc. But Tom, if you don't cultivate some respect for that chair, you'll break its legs, to say nothing of your neck, if you tilt back much farther."

"What do you say about passing a few weeks

with us there?" said Tom, lowering his chair a trifle. To tell the truth, there are no attractions whatever about the place, with the exception of boating, bathing, and fishing. But who cares for society? That is just what Uncle Ralph goes there to avoid. We will have a right glorious old time by ourselves. There are four young ladies in the party, all of them as heart-breaking and bewitching as any specimen of femininity to be found in the land. Aunt Marion, who places the most implicit confidence in my discretion, has given me *carte blanche* to invite as many friends as I please to accompany me; so as soon as I had read the letter, I posted right down to this Tophet of a place to secure your services. And now, Graham, I cannot take *no* for an answer. You must join us. Besides, I would like the pleasure of introducing you to my queenly cousin Maud, and show her that for once her *scapegrace* cousin—as she sweetly calls me—can display some sense in the selection of his friends for such an occasion."

"May I ask to what style of femininity this queenly Miss Maud belongs?"

"Oh, she's a glorious girl, if she is my cousin—

> "'She is beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd;
> She's a woman, and therefore to be won.'"

"Indeed! What a paragon she must be."

"Well, I give you fair warning. If you break your heart over her it won't be my fault. She has caught more fish on her line than ever a girl did before."

"She's a flirt, then, I suppose," said Graham, with a shrug. "I do not fancy that style of girl myself."

"But she is not one," returned Tom, emphatically. "A flirt employs her charms and fascinations to entrap unwary mortals only to let them die a lingering death when another new victim comes along. But goodness! some of Maud's adorers have tumbled head over heels in love with her, without so much as her knowing it."

"Nonsense, Tom! As if a girl did not know when a fellow was in love with her," said Graham, with a sceptical smile.

"You may laugh as much as you like, but it is an indisputable fact, nevertheless. Maud is the noblest, most wilful, perverse, and lovely specimen of womankind I know, and her younger sisters are following in her footsteps as fast as old Time will permit. She is twenty-three, and is not engaged yet, though I will not vouch for the continuance of her freedom. She has one most persistent admirer who outstrips all the others in the amount of perseverance he displays in his suit. If determination and audacity ever couquered a woman's heart, Maud might as well succumb to the fates at once, for he is gifted with a most amazing amount of both. As the girls say, 'If you will promise not to tell,' I will whisper his name."

"I promise solemnly," said Graham, laughing.

"Well, then, it is none other than the stately

Kingsland, who you know owns a fine place on Lake Champlain, near Tremount Hall. This is all *entre nous*, for Maud would annihilate me completely if she knew I had told you this piece of gossip."

"You do not mean Harold Kingsland, whose office you are in?"

"The very same, and the mystery is, that such a reserved, haughty fellow as he is should submit for a moment to Maud's provoking indifference to his attentions. Ashton, his partner, is also a trifle soft in that direction, to say nothing of countless lesser lights which flicker around her path whenever she condescends to leave her ordinary orbit and come to town. But how she can treat Kingsland so is beyond my comprehension, for a finer fellow never breathed, yourself excepted," and making a sweeping bow, he flourished his umbrella in the air, thereby disturbing the delicate equilibrum of his chair, which tipped backward, and occasioned the performance of sundry gymnastic feats on the part of the enthusiastic young gentleman to recover his balance.

"Thank you for the compliment," said Graham, with a hearty laugh, as he picked up Tom's hat; "but your brilliant exhibition of muscular Christianity was hardly necessary to enforce it. I imagine, however, that you are a more ardent admirer of his than Miss Maud is. Are the other sisters equally dangerous?"

"Ethel is a second edition of Maud, though

three years younger, and is just as fascinating as she is lovely in appearance."

"Gracious! And what of the other one?"

"Bessie is not as pretty as her sisters, but she is the dearest, naughtiest little witch of a romp in existence, and my special pet. Beside my cousins, the girls have a friend staying with them, a Miss Preston."

"Is she as wonderful a beauty as the others?"

"Would you like to know my private opinion of the girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, she is handsome, haughty, and hateful. How do you like the picture."

"It certainly might be prettier," returned his friend, with a smile. "I'm afraid your intercourse with the young lady has proved rather detrimental to your own feelings. Is your tender passion reciprocated?"

"I should rather think it was. We dislike each other most cordially, and I never neglect an opportunity to give her an exhibition of my appreciation of her love for me, and the high estimation in which I hold her."

"I advise you to discontinue such unusual gallantry, for you will most assuredly come off second best in your encounters with her. The ladies always get the upper hand of us by their unreasonable whims and unlooked-for caprices (though the dear little souls are not generally conscious of the power they wield), but never so successfully as

when their tongues fight their battles for them. I never knew a woman who could not manage in some unconscionable way to have what she wanted. By her gentle flattery, or tantalizing coolness, she invariably gains her point, whether it be right or not. Recollect what your own favorite author says :

> " ' Heat not the furnace of your foe so hot
> That it do singe yourself.' "

" Well, Graham, you've hit the nail on the head, for I must confess the melancholy truth, that Miss Loo does contrive to leave a sting whenever she uses my susceptible feelings as a target for her poisoned darts. But I flatter myself that she too is not impervious to the sharp little arrows which I let fly at her occasionally, by way of testing her armor."

" If *you* are not proof against such an array of beauty, witchery, and coquetry, *I* should be thoroughly demoralized were I to encounter such overwhelming forces ; so perhaps it is quite as well that this annoying business of mine will prevent me from joining your party."

" Is it so very pressing that you could not spare at least a week with us at the shore ? "

" I don't see how I can leave town at present," replied Graham, running his fingers wearily through the dark clustering locks on his forehead. " You know that Daton will case is to be tried next month, and I am not half prepared for it."

" Oh, bother the will case ! Can't you let the

thing slip for a few weeks longer? There is no necessity whatever for being in such a desperate hurrry about it. Old Daton is dead, and the Wrights can survive the decision of the will for a while longer. Besides, I heard Kingsland say last week that the case was to be postponed until the spring term, as there is such a pressure of work on hand, that the minor cases cannot be tried this fall."

"Are you quite positive?"

"I could swear to it; so just get your hat and go with me to Parker's. It is too confoundedly hot in this oven of an office to breathe,—to say nothing of the savage condition of my appetite."

"I don't think we will improve our condition materially by a walk up Broadway at this melting hour of the day," said Graham, as he removed his white linen office coat, and donned a dark cloth one.

"Well, it is better than staying here to melt by inches," replied Tom, opening the door.

CHAPTER II.

SEABRIGHT.

USING his pursuasive eloquence with his usual success, Clayton had induced Graham to spend a few days with him at Seabright, and the following morning found the two friends on their way thither. As they approached the old-fashioned rambling little cottage which Mr. Tremount had rented for the summer, the stillness of the place, usually broken only by the rushing and tumbling of the waves upon the shore, was disturbed by the sound of merry, girlish laughter issuing from the house. Stepping quietly up to one of the windows, Tom cautiously peeped through the half-closed blind into the room. It was a large, airy apartment, with numerous windows running from the floor to the low ceiling, and opening on to a broad, pleasant piazza. This was shaded by a sweeping roof, and extended all round the house. A group of young ladies was sitting by one of the open windows engaged in a variety of fancy-work, from the inevitable smoking-cap and slippers, to delicate embroidery and mazy crocheting.

A fine-looking man of thirty three or four, with

a somewhat dark and haughty mien, sat by the centre-table, turning over the contents of a dainty little work-basket belonging to Maud Tremount, who sat opposite him. Although so deeply engaged, his thoughts were preoccupied, and he noted not the pretty look of consternation with which his fair neighbor regarded the havoc he had made. The odds and ends and numerous little fixings reposing a short time ago in orderly contentment within the silken compartments of her basket, were now jumbled together in hopeless confusion. Tangled skeins of colored silks were knotted up with balls of cord and tiny spools of thread; pins stuck into the needle-case, and needles run into the pin-cushion, their golden heads hidden among the beads and worsted; and all the contents of the unfortunate basket thrown together in the indescribable confusion which is only effective and endurable under a gentleman's hands.

So thought Maud Tremount as she gazed with rueful countenance on the work of devastation before her. She was an elegant-looking girl of twenty-three. Her queenly grace of manner and beautiful face made her unusually attractive, while her varied accomplishments and sparkling wit drew around her a host of admirers, whose attentions, however, she received with seeming indifference.

Ethel, though of less commanding presence, was her sister's counterpart in form and feature. She was sitting on a low chair by the window, through

which the ocean breeze crept deliciously, lifting the soft curls from her fair brow. Beside her on the floor, sat golden-haired Bessie, teasing a little white kitten with empty spools on a string.

Miss Preston completed the group. She was a handsome brunette, with a full, stylish figure and graceful manner. The large, black eyes could beam with soft, alluring smiles, or burn like hot coals, according as her vanity or jealousy was touched.

A voice from the window startled Bessie ; looking up, she saw Tom's eyes peering through the shutter, as he attempted to raise the rusty fastening.

With a scream which aroused the whole party, she sprang to the window, and opening the blind, dragged Tom into the room, exclaiming :

" Why, Tom, you blessed boy, when did you come ? we girls were just talking about you."

" Speak for yourself, if you please," remarked Miss Preston, as she declined Tom's offered hand, and coolly bowed to him.

" Well, pussy and I were ; weren't we, dear ? " said the girl, catching up the kitten and cuddling it up to her neck.

" Doubtless Bessie and the cat were very profitably engaged," returned Miss Preston, sarcastically,as she took up her worsted work. " What she can find in that animal to pet and hug, *I* cannot imagine. I hate the very sight of cats, with their treacherous, cunning ways."

" I have frequently thought that in some of your

finer characteristics you very much resembled the feline race," replied Tom, with a very perceptible sneer on his face.

"Tom, can you never meet Loo without quarrelling?" said Maud, tapping his arm. "Where is your friend? I thought you were going to bring some one with you."

"So I have, cousin mine—but," he whispered, "that confounded girl always drives me distracted whenever I see her. Graham is on the piazza; I'll call him in."

As that gentlemen entered, Tom presented him to his cousins and Kingsland; then turning to Miss Preston, said, ironically:

"Ah, I beg your pardon, Miss Preston, allow me to present my friend Mr. Graham. I have been quite anxious that you should meet."

Miss Preston colored, and bowed distantly.

"Where is Aunt Marion, Maud?" said Tom, stepping up to his cousin. "Graham and I are hot and dusty, and would like to be shown to our respective *sanctums*."

"Here I am," said Mrs. Tremount, entering the room, and giving her nephew a kind, motherly kiss, after which she shook hands with Graham, with whose elegant appearance she was instantly prepossessed.

"Mr. Kingsland, have you no regard for the 'eternal fitness' of things?" said Maud, with a dubious smile, as she gazed in despair at the chaotic condition of her work-basket.

"Really, I had no idea I was committing such depredations; I was thinking of something else," he answered, remorsefully. "I shall have to atone for my delinquencies by replacing things as I found them."

"Rather a hopeless task, considering you have not the faintest idea where they belong," replied Maud, smiling.

"I will follow the directions of the old nursery rhyme of 'Try, try again.'"

"Oh, please have mercy on my poor embroidery silk; it is all I have here," she said, as he endeavored to disentangle a gordian knot of twisted cotton and sewing silk. "You had better let me get the knots out," and placing her hand on the basket, she attempted to draw it from him.

Instead of relinquishing the basket, he placed his own hand on hers, saying in a low tone;

"Maud, do you know what I was thinking about?"

"How can I tell? I am no conjurer," she replied lightly, as she withdrew her hand.

"I was thinking how lonely it will be at Hazelhurst next winter, unless some one comes to share my solitude, and brighten the old mansion with her cheering presence."

"Is not your housekeeper going to remain?" said Maud, demurely.

"Yes; but think you she is what I need?"

"Why, I think she is the dearest old body you could possibly have," replied Maud, looking down

at her work, and provokingly mistaking his meaning.

Kingsland was silent. He knew that Maud understood him, though she so coolly evaded a direct answer. Nerving himself to another effort, he bent his dark, piercing eyes full on her face, as he said quietly :

" Look at me an instant." Lifting her eyes to his, she dropped them quickly as she caught the meaning of the lustrous eyes fixed upon her.

" Now you know what I want, Maud, and what I must have."

" *Must!* You talk in enigmas, Mr. Kingsland ; I do not comprehend you," she answered haughtily, though she colored violently. Tossing her work into the basket, she turned, saying, " Ethel, Loo, it is time to dress for supper," and hastening to the door, which Kingsland opened for her, she left the room, not deigning to return the stern though reproachful glance which he bestowed upon her as she passed him.

The following week passed too quickly to the gay young party at Seabright. Guy Ashton, Kingsland's partner, had come up for a few days, and numerous were the diversions which Maud and Tom planned for the entertainment of their guests.

Kingsland sought unavailingly an interview with Maud, particularly as he noted with mingled feelings of jealousy and chagrin the marked attentions which Ashton was paying her. His only consolation lay in the indifference and dislike

which she appeared to entertain for his partner, though the latter persisted with unflagging zeal in his attentions.

Many were the baskets of beautiful flowers and luscious fruits that found their way to Seabright, arousing Miss Preston's curiosity and jealousy, and exposing Maud to the full battery of Tom's teasing. She did not know from which gentleman they came, though she secretly felt that Ashton, with all his extravagance of dress, had neither sufficient heart nor generosity to send them.

While standing alone in the parlor one morning, a basket of exquisite flowers was brought to her. As she leaned over them, inhaling their rich perfume, and caressingly touching a bunch of tiny rose-buds that lay fresh and wet on the top, Kingsland entered, and the bright light which flashed in his eyes as they met hers, instantly revealed the secret. The color surged up in her cheeks, mantling her very brow. With a look of intense arrogance she abruptly walked out of the room, leaving the flowers untouched, and Kingsland to digest his mortification with what equanimity he could.

One evening after tea, Ethel and Bessie with most of their guests started for a walk on the beach, leaving Maud, who had declined to go, with her mother on the piazza. The deep roar of the ocean was stilled, though the waves danced and sparkled in merry frolic under the silvery light of the moon. The evening wind blew freshly

in from the sea, and Mrs. Tremount, finding the air too damp, retired to the parlor. Maud walked up and down the long piazza for some time; then taking a blanket shawl on her arm, she ran down the steps and walked slowly towards a slight rocky elevation a few rods from the house. Throwing her shawl on the stones, she sat down and gazed with thoughtful eyes on the beautiful scene before her. The sound of approaching steps startled her, and turning around, she perceived Ashton standing close beside her.

"Pardon me for coming upon you so abruptly," he said, with an insinuating smile. "Will you allow me to sit down?"

"Certainly," replied Maud, coldly, as she ungraciously offered him a small portion of her shawl.

"One would think you begrudged me even this corner," he said, in a half-mortified tone.

"Not at all; there is plenty of room on these rocks for a dozen more people."

For a few moments neither spoke; then Ashton, leaning forward, said softly:

"Do you remember those hours we passed together last winter at Mrs. Moseley's?" referring to a visit which Maud had made in town.

"Yes," she answered, indifferently.

"To me they were the most precious I ever spent."

"Indeed!" more frigidly than before.

"I cherish them very warmly in my memory, and wish they could be repeated."

Maud did not reply, but gazed resolutely at the great watery expanse before her, seemingly unconscious of the tender and admiring glance bestowed upon her by her companion.

"I missed you among the young ladies," he resumed, "and as there was no attraction for me in the party without your beautiful face to smile upon me, I followed you hither."

"You honor me by your preference," said Maud, sarcastically, "but I assure you I am unable to appreciate your gentle flattery. I refused to join the others because I preferred to be alone."

Ashton bit his lip and was about to make an angry reply, but there was too much at stake, a beautiful girl whom he loved as deeply as was in his nature to love, and a large fortune which he loved still better and was bent upon possessing; so he said gently:

"I loved you the first time we met, Maud; may I not cherish the hope that—"

"You are presuming too far, Mr. Ashton," she interrupted haughtily, rising from her seat.

"No, I am not," he exclaimed passionately, thoroughly roused by her coldness; and seizing her hand, he forcibly retained it as he poured into her ear the renewed declaration of his love.

"You are forgetting yourself," said Maud angrily, releasing her hand. "I tolerate your presence here only because you are my cousin's friend and my father's guest. If you had sufficient respect for yourself, I should think you

would hardly have dared to recur to this odious subject again. You met me last winter for the sole purpose of winning my love; you employed all the arts and fascinations of which you are master to entangle my affections, but you were defeated with your own weapons. I rejected your proposals with the scorn they deserved, and I now repeat that I despise your protestations of love as heartily as I do—"

"Myself!" interrupted Ashton, with angry insolence.

"Exactly," said Maud, contemptuously. "I have not forgotten your heartless conduct toward poor Miss Lawrence, and you may rest assured I shall neglect no opportunity to warn young girls against you, unless I find that they are capable of meeting you on your own ground, as I did. Now leave me; I would be alone."

Angry and crestfallen, Ashton turned to leave her, but catching the cold, scornful smile on Maud's pale face, he placed his hand heavily on her shoulder, and exclaimed, with a half-smothered oath:

"This interview will doubtless form an interesting topic of conversation among you ladies to-morrow. But," he added meaningly, in a low, vindictive tone, "whatever *you* may say, it is in *my* power to retaliate for the contemptuous manner in which you have treated me, in a way of which you are little aware, and possibly may influence your lover's feelings against you."

"I have no lover," said Maud proudly, moving away from him as she spoke, though she trembled at the import of his words. "I scorn your base insinuations, and give you permission to retaliate in whatever manner your honor as a *gentleman* will permit. But I wish you to understand that henceforth we meet as strangers. You are a guest here because you are the son of my father's best friend; he likes you only because he does not know you; if he did, you would be forbidden the house. Now leave me," and waving her hand, she haughtily dismissed him.

Maud watched him until he was out of sight; then picking up her shawl she hurried toward the house, hoping to reach it before the rest of the party returned from their walk. Going round to the back of the house, she ran up the steps and looked into the sitting-room window, where she saw her mother reading by the cosy student-lamp. Breathless and agitated, she paused to recover herself, then turning an angle of the house, she stumbled against Kingsland, who was quietly smoking a cigar in the moonlight.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, springing up as he saw her pale, frightened face; and making her sit down, he waited until she spoke.

"I—I—thought you were with the girls," she said, endeavoring to speak calmly.

"I did start out with them, but gradually wandered away, and finally found myself ensconced

in this little nook. Where have you been? I missed you among the young ladies."

"I have been over there among the rocks."

"What frightened you? you looked quite pale and startled when you came here."

"Oh! don't ask me," she cried.

"Was Ashton with you?" asked Kingsland, abruptly.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because he was not with the rest of the party."

Maud did not reply, and Kingsland, bending over her, said anxiously:

"Has he been doing anything to annoy you?"

"Oh! don't ask me; let me go in, I am so cold out here."

But Kingsland put her back in the chair, and wrapping the shawl softly around her, said gently:

"Not yet; this is my last evening at Seabright, and I want it to be one of the brightest of my life."

"Please let me go in," said Maud, hastily rising and putting forth her hand half-deprecatingly.

Imprisoning it in his own, he bent his head, and said in low, earnest tones:

"Maud, I waited here purposely for you. I saw Ashton follow you to the rocks, and I knew his errand; can you imagine the suspense I was in until I saw him return? As he walked off alone, I knew the interview had not been propitious for him, so there was hope for me. Is there now?"

Maud trembled violently, and strove to with-

draw her hand. But clasping it still tighter, he said, in a voice which thrilled every nerve:

"I have waited here to ask of you the greatest boon which you could bestow on me. Maud, you know that I love you—"

"Oh, stop, stop!" she interrupted him implor-ingly; "you must not—"

"Listen to me; you must hear me. Will you be my wife, darling?"

The words were spoken in tones so low, so sweet, so full of entreaty, that she could not resist them, and for one brief moment her head rested on his shoulder. Then springing away from him, she exclaimed, nervously:

"I cannot; oh, leave me, Mr. Kingsland."

"Not until I hear you repeat those words," he answered, hoarsely. "Do you love me, or are you the heartless coquette I have heard you called?"

The last words stung her; agitated from her late stormy interview with Ashton, bewildered and surprised by Kingsland's unexpected avowal, she lost all control of herself, and exclaimed, half-defi-antly, half-passionately:

"I am all and everything you have ever heard me called," and bursting into tears, she hurried into the house, and went to her room.

Throwing herself on a lounge by the window, she pressed her hands to her burning brow, and endeavored to collect her thoughts. Indignant with Ashton, she hardly realized the passionate

words she had uttered to Kingsland until too late to recall them.

"Maud, where are you?" said Ethel, opening the door and peering into the room. "Everybody is asking for you downstairs; why don't you come down?"

"I will go down presently; don't wait for me."

"But you had better come now. What is the matter? are you ill?"

"No."

"Well, then, you must go down now. Your actions this evening have given rise to the suspicion that you met Mr. Ashton by appointment. Loo is dying with curiosity to know where you have been, and Tom has prepared himself to tease you unmercifully. Mr. Kingsland looks severely solemn, and as for Mr. Ashton, I should not be surprised if he had thrown himself into the sea through jealousy, for he hasn't come home yet. So do come down and dispel the gathering gloom."

"How can I meet them all?" said Maud, forlornly. "My eyes are red, and I look so dreadfully."

"I'll run down first and tell them that you were lying down, waiting for us to come home, and none will notice your eyes, for the lamp burns so dimly to-night one can scarcely see to read."

When Maud entered the room, she found rather a listless group lounging around. Bessie was sitting in the corner of the sofa half asleep, and occasionally waking up sufficiently to scold Tom, who

sat beside her, dividing his attentions between tickling her ear with a straw, and scandalizing Miss Preston by his personal and not over-complimentary remarks. Kingsland sat by the centre-table, ostensibly reading, while Ethel and Graham were engaged in a lively game of backgammon in an obscure corner of the room.

"Did you have a pleasant walk?" said Miss Preston, addressing Maud as she entered.

"Quite so, she answered, coolly.

"Where did you go? Over yonder by the rocks?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, merely from curiosity."

"Don't gratify her, then," said Tom, walking toward the hall, where he met Ashton.

"Well, old fellow, what have you been about? Sentimentalizing by the sad sea waves, eh?"

"'One summer eve, with pensive thought,
I wandered by the sea-beat shore,'"

drawled Ashton, in his soft, effeminate voice, as he took a seat by Maud.

"I did not know but you had fallen in love with some sea-nymph, and been lured to her pearly cave by her siren song. But come, let us have some music. Maud, will you play an accompaniment?"

As Maud walked toward the piano, Ashton stepped forward saying in his tenderest tones, as he offered his arm:

"Allow me the pleasure."

Looking at him with eyes fairly ablaze with indignation, she scornfully repelled him, and swept by without speaking. Catching Kingsland's eye, she was almost dazzled by the bright look which flashed in his face for an instant. Her fingers trembled as she touched the keys, but recovering her self-possession she finished the song without faltering.

"Now, girls, you must retire," said Mrs. Tremount rising. "Where is Bessie? I have not seen her this evening."

"Here she is, sound asleep on the sofa," said Tom "I'll wake her up." Which he proceeded to do in true cousinly style, by pulling the cushions from under her head.

"Who's there?" said Bessie, sitting up and rubbing her eyes.

"It is I, my dear; so wake up, if you please, and bestow upon me the rich effulgence of your glorious smile."

"Is that you, Tom. I had such a funny dream" —here she interrupted herself by a yawn. "I thought you were a lobster and I was a clam, and you tried to get me out of my shell by poking in one of your long red whiskers." (Another yawn, which made the tears start to her eyes.)

"Lobsters don't usually have red whiskers until they are boiled, at least not to *my* knowledge," laughed Tom. "You probably mistook this ornament" (caressing his mustache), "for the stiff feelers of a lobster."

"You kissed me!"

"Well!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Bessie, with an indignant yawn.

"Highty tighty! And have I not done it before in my life. But please, if you have *any* mercy on my maxillary muscles, don't repeat that jaw-dislocating operation again," putting his hand over her mouth, which was wide open for another yawn. "I could not get you out of your shell, little coz, so I'll put you in another, where you can stay until to-morrow morning, if you like," and catching her up in his arms, he ran up-stairs and deposited her in the middle of the room, too sleepy and astonished to make any remonstrance.

CHAPTER III.

FIDELITAS.

THE next morning Kingsland left for New York; no one of the merry group assembled on the piazza to bid him farewell dreamed that two aching hearts beat beneath the cold and indifferent exteriors which he and Maud exhibited at parting. Miss Preston, accompanied by Ashton, took her departure a few hours after Kingsland, leaving Tom and Graham to ensure the girls against *ennui* during the few remaining days of their visit at Seabright.

Ethel's lovely face and bright and joyous disposition had already captured Graham, and he took little pains to conceal the ardent admiration which he entertained for her.

As they were rambling along the beach one evening towards sunset, Ethel said, gayly :

"Mr. Graham, won't you give me one more row on the river before we leave Seabright? To-morrow we will all be so busy getting the trunks and baggage off, I don't think we will have an opportunity."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure,"

replied Graham readily, as he walked toward the boat-house on the Shrewsbury river, a little stream running parallel with the shore and a few hundred feet from it.

Unfastening the boat, he assisted Ethel into the stern, and taking up the oars, rowed gently out into the river. The golden and crimson clouds in the west reflected their gorgeous hues on the waters, which danced and rippled in rosy wavelets around the boat. Rowing out some distance, Graham rested upon his oars, and gazed with silent admiration on the wondrously beautiful scene around him. Ethel, who was idly dipping her hand in the water over the side of the boat, seemed to his imagination the lovliest picture of all—a sweet smile of contentment and happiness resting on her fair young face, as she half reclined on her seat, unconscious of his gaze.

Lifting her eyes, she met Graham's, with all his soul in them, shining upon her, and her cheeks caught the color of the skies, as the blushes swept over them.

Neither uttered a word, though Graham smiled as he resumed his oars.

In that bright, brief glance, each revealed to the other more than either imagined; an undefined thrill of ecstasy pervaded their hearts, and the little chord of love, fine and soft, but infinitely strong in texture, was surely, silently throwing itself around every thought and fibre of their lives.

"Ethel—Mr. Graham—mamma says you had

better come in," called Bessie's clear voice from the house.

"We'll go in directly," shouted Graham, awaking from the spell which bound him, and rowing swiftly towards the shore. Drawing the boat up on the beach, he lifted Ethel out, then fastening the door of the boat-house, he turned toward her, saying, as he drew her arm within his :

"Will you keep this little bauble as a memento of our last bright evening at the sea-shore ? "

Placing in her hand at the same time a small sandal-wood box, he watched her narrowly as she opened it. Reposing on a white satin lining, was a little golden ball, beautifully enamelled, on one side of which was traced, in fine running letters, *Fidelitas*, and on the other, *C. G.* A tiny golden key, attached by a slender chain to the ring on top, suggested the idea that the ball opened. As she looked up with a perplexed and inquiring air to Graham's face, he took it from her, saying quietly :

"This little ball belonged to my mother when she was a young girl like you. Will you keep it till we meet again, Ethel ? The key I will retain."

"Why, Mr. Graham, I don't know what it is. I—I—cannot except it," she replied, with hesitation.

"You need not look so troubled ; its contents cannot harm you," he answered, smiling at her look of alarm and embarrassment. "I do not ask you to accept it now ; I only request you to wear it for

me," and unscrewing the ring on top, he quietly fastened it to her watch-chain, and attaching the key to his own, said gayly:

"You cannot remove this little bombshell without my assistance, unless you do it forcibly. Possibly I may unlock it the next time we meet, and reveal its contents to you. Promise me that you will not use any means to unfasten it from your chain," he added, taking her hand and looking earnestly into her face.

Ethel turned the ball round, and endeavored to pull it off. Finding the effort unsuccessful, she looked up, and said, half-laughingly:

"This little lock is as secure as the bolts and bars of a Bastile, Mr. Graham, so I don't see what use there is in my promising not to take the ball off."

"But I want you, nevertheless, to promise me solemnly not to remove it."

"Why, I should have to ask a blacksmith to perform the operation for me, which I am not likely to do, so I shall not make the promise," she replied, with a bewitching smile.

"And you absolutly refuse to promise me," he asked, in a disappointed tone.

"If I promise to wear it, is that not enough?" she said, archly.

"I suppose I shall have to rest content with small favors," he returned, pleasantly. "Now let us go back to the house; it is too damp for you to remain out here any longer."

The next day, the little party at Seabright was broken up. The Tremounts returned to their home in Champlain, and Tom and Graham went back to town. Bessie and Miss Preston returned to Madam De Lainy's school, to participate for the last time in those pleasures and perplexities of school-girl life which are seldom if ever appreciated at the time, but are ever after cherished lovingly in the memory.

CHAPTER IV.

TREMOUNT HALL.

TREMOUNT HALL was a fine gothic mansion, surrounded by cultivated lawns, and rolling woodlands, near the shore of Lake Champlain. The Tremounts were of English extraction, and the house had been built after the pattern of the old homestead in Derbyshire. Its gabled roof and towers, long casements, and low, square balconies of the second story, gave it the appearance of an English home of mediæval times, and this effect was heightened by dark masses of ivy, which clung caressingly to its gray walls or drooped gracefully from the stone projections of the tower. Bay-windows and low, broad piazzas lent an air of cheerfulness to the place, which otherwise would have presented too stern an aspect to accord with the modern and hospitable ideas of its present owner.

Within, all was ease and elegance. The large library, with its wainscoted walls, deep book recesses, and quaint old family portraits, was the most charming room in the house. Before the bright wood-fire, which blazed and crackled on

the hearth, sat Maud and Ethel Tremount. It was a clear, cold afternoon late in December. The sun had gone to rest behind the distant hills of the Adirondacks, and twilight gray came stealing on, clothing all the fair winter landscape in a sober livery.

Ethel sat on a low chair by the fire, dreamily toying with the silken ear of Don, a noble hound, who lay stretched on the rug at her feet. Maud, with one hand partially shading her brow, was gazing, with an all-absorbed expression on her face, into the glowing embers. The door opened, and Kingsland was announced. The vivid color which flushed in her cheeks, as she arose to greet him, told what had been the subject of her thoughts, while Ethel, awakening from her reverie, came forward, saying:

"Oh, Mr. Kingsland, has the train arrived? Did the rest of the party come with you?"

"I was not aware that you were expecting company," he replied, patting Don's head, as the dog rubbed his cold nose against his hand. "I have just returned from a business trip to the lumber district, and only received your mother's kind invitation for Christmas week before I drove over here."

"We are expecting Bessie and Tom, with several other friends," said Maud. "I should think they ought to be here by this time."

"We were occupied all the morning dressing the house with greens," said Ethel, "and this after-

noon we have been busy doing nothing, which occupation you caught us in just now."

"Judging from your faces, I imagined you were both engaged in castle building," said Kingsland, turning toward Maud. "Confess, were you not?"

"Twilight is generally considered the best time to indulge in that absurd amusement," she answered, evasively.

"Then you plead guilty?"

"I suppose I shall have to," she replied, lightly.

"'I built myself a castle,
So noble, grand, and fair;
I built myself a castle—
A castle in the air.'"

"And peopled it with very substantial realities, I presume," interrupted Kingsland.

"I did not *say* so," she said, laughingly.

"'And now you see it shattered,
My castle in the air;
It lies a dreary ruin,
All desolate and bare.'

"You see its foundations were so very insecure that the whole structure fell to the ground as soon as you came in."

"Indeed? then I am supposed to be the author of the mischief," he returned, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"Not at all. These *châteaux en espagne* are so very ethereal in their construction, that they crumble to ruin at the slightest provocation."

"Tell me, with whom did you people your airy fortress?" he asked in low, eager tones, as he leaned forward.

"With myself," she answered, avoiding his eye.

"You surely did not occupy the palace alone. It would not be in accordance with the prevailing idea of castle-building, for one being to live in solitary blessedness within its halls."

At this point, Ethel finding herself quite ignored, and seeing that the conversation was becoming too serious for her to play third party to it with any degree of politeness, said demurely:

"It seems to me, you are very metaphorical. Please do recollect that Don and I are here, and we of course do not understand you."

Maud colored, and Kingsland, taking the hint, asked quietly:

"When do you expect your company, Miss Ethel?"

"Upon the arrival of the four o'clock train. It is time they were here now," she replied, walking to the window and looking down the road.

Maud and Kingsland were silent, each wrapped in thought. The lamps were yet unlighted, but the glowing firelight danced and flickered upon the wall, lighting up the dark oak panels, and deepening the rich bloom on Maud's cheek. Kingsland sat with his arms folded, gazing steadfastly at the fire, a half-sad, half-stern expression resting upon his haughty features. Maud's eyes burned with a soft, yearning light, and a tender smile broke

over her face, as with clapsed hands she looked at him with an earnestness of which she was little aware. At that moment, Kingsland raised his eyes and met hers, which he held with a power which she could not resist. In that long glance he read what he had long looked for, and a brilliant smile dispelled the gloomy expression on his face, as he stepped towards her. Frightened and mortified at the revelation which she had unwittingly made, and with an unaccountable freak of wayward woman-nature, she arose from her seat, and without vouchsafing him a glance, joined Ethel, who was still waiting impatiently at the window for the arrival of the sleigh.

The bright fall months had sped quickly by, and beautiful Christmas, crowned with wreaths of frost and evergreen, had come. The same party which had separated at Seabright in the summer, were again to meet at Tremount Hall to enjoy the Christmas holidays.

The grand old-fashioned sleigh, with its softly cushioned seats and warm, fleecy robes, had been sent to Millford Station to meet the evening train from New York. Happy indeed were the tired travellers to exchange the confinement and closeness of the cars for the pleasures of the sleigh-ride and the clear, bracing air of the country. A beautiful winter scene greeted their eyes as they rode swiftly over the beaten path. An ice-storm the day previous had enveloped every twig and branch of the tall old forest trees with crystal robes, that

glistened and shone resplendent under the bright beams of a full-orbed moon, which made the heavy, overarching boughs with their icy covering, and the sparkling snow with its silver sheen, look like a frozen corridor in an enchanted fairy palace.

After half an hour's drive, the horses dashed up the broad, sweeping avenue of Tremount Hall, and stood panting and breathless, while Bessie, Miss Preston, Tom, and his friends sprang out of the sleigh. A hearty, joyous welcome they received, and very pleasant seemed the warm, genial atmosphere of the house after their cold but merry ride from the station.

The result of Maud and Ethel's busy morning was evident everywhere. Evergreens were tastefully arranged around parlors, dining-room, and halls, and drooped in graceful festoons over pictures, pillars, and arching doorway; while between the rich, dark greens of ivy and hemlock the holly's brilliant red berries peeped brightly. Flowers from the conservatory adorned the rooms, making the air of the house redolent with perfume. One might readily imagine that some tropical clime had dropped its treasures over the stately mansion, had not the crackling of the hugh wood-fire, leaping and sparkling on the bright, old-fashioned andirons, reminded one of the necessity of defeating the Frost Spirit—

"And turn with the light of the parlor-fire his evil power away,
And gather closer the circle round when the firelight dances high,
And laugh at the shrieks of the baffled fiend, as his sounding wings go by."

Christmas week passed quickly with its sleigh-rides, coasting, and skating, and one large party at Millford, a pretty little village nestling at the base of a range of hills, four miles distant from Tremount Hall.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE BY MOONLIGHT THAT WAS NOT ALL A ROMANCE.

MAUD and Bessie with their guests were returning late in the evening from the party, and all had crowded into the large family sleigh but Graham and Ethel, who followed rather leisurely behind in Tom's little cutter. As they drove over the frozen snow-path, the merry sounds of the sleigh-bells, ringing out musically in the clear evening air, the surpassing beauty of the night, together with the presence of the lovely girl at his side, with her brown curls tossed back from her glowing cheeks, and her eyes dancing with the excitement of her drive, produced a combination of influences which made this young man more deeply in love than ever.

"Let me drive for a little while, and you take my muff to warm your hands," said Ethel, putting out her fur-gloved hand to take the reins.

"Those little hands of yours would freeze in such an atmosphere as this; I am warmly protected with these," displaying a huge pair of seal-skin

gloves, which covered half his arm; and putting her hand back, he tucked the robes more warmly around her.

"Hark! What is that!" cried Ethel, starting forward; at the same time Selim shied violently, and started on a gallop down the road.

"It was only a dog barking in some neighboring farm-house," said Graham, reining the horse into a trot.

"Oh no, it can't be; it is the cry of a wolf," she replied, looking behind her in alarm.

"Why, I was not aware that there were wolves around this region."

"Oh, yes there are; they come down from the forests in Canada sometimes during our coldest weather, in search of food. It was only two weeks ago that Miller shot one as he was prowling around the barns at the farm. I know their cry too well to mistake it, for I heard it last summer while Maud and I were camping out in the Adirondacks with papa and Tom."

"Well, if they do come, they will meet with a warm reception; there is a six-barrelled revolver fully loaded under the seat. Tom carelessly left it in the sleigh this afternoon, and it is fortunate for us that he did." Stooping down, he searched for the weapon, and soon displayed to Ethel's eyes a silver-mounted revolver, which gleamed menacingly in the moonlight.

A deep, ominous sound from the woods behind them again broke upon the still night air.

"Oh! there they are! Look, look, Mr. Graham!" screamed Ethel, clutching his arm and pointing to a low, dark mass moving rapidly towards them.

"Be a brave girl, and help me," said Graham, in a firm, reassuring voice. "Take the reins and keep Selim in the middle of the road if you can. There are only two of the brutes, and I will keep them at bay with this pistol until we reach the schoolhouse below the hill."

Nearer and nearer they came, making night hideous with their howls. Ethel still kept the reins, guiding the terror-stricken horse over the frozen ground as best she could. The spirited little Arabian finally flew over the road, scattering the snow and ice in a crystal cloud in Ethel's face, but the wolves gained rapidly upon them, and were now within a few hundred feet of the flying sleigh. Graham, with a well-directed aim, wounded the foremost, which only infuriated without disabling him. They were almost within reach of the schoolhouse, when Selim stopped, reared, and swerved to one side of the road. One of the brutes, making a *détour* among the trees, had come upon him from behind a mass of underbush, and springing upon his haunches, fixed his fangs in his quivering flesh. Snorting with terror, he made one wild, desperate plunge, shook the monster off, and started on a mad galop home.

Graham and Ethel were both thrown out of the sleigh. While extricating herself from the heavy

buffalo robes which enveloped her, Ethel heard a frightful yell, which seem to freeze her very soul; throwing aside her wrappings, she sprang up to see Graham with one hand clutching the throat of the furious animal, and endeavoring with the other to regain his pistol. With the wild strength of despair, he still kept him off, though his hand was gradually relaxing its hold on the neck of the wolf. Ethel picked up the revolver, and, hardly knowing at what she aimed, fired. The brute fell mortally wounded. Hastily putting the pistol in his pocket, Graham seized Ethel in his arms, and ran to the school-house, reaching the door just as the other wolf, baffled of his prey, sprang after him, almost knocking down the side-posts of the door with his heavy weight.

Depositing Ethel on a bench in one corner of the room, Graham proceeded to examine the doors and windows. Faint with excitement, she sat still and strove to collect her senses. The room was dismally dark, with the exception of a narrow ray of moonlight which streamed in through a crack in one of the shutters. Through the dimness she perceived a ladder leading up to a loft above.

"Had we not better mount the ladder?" she said to Graham, "that creature outside may break open the shutter, and you know the sashes have no glass in them."

"They would prove of little protection if they had," he returned, looking out of the crack in the window.

"Oh, Mr. Graham, don't leave me!" she cried, in alarm. "I hear a noise by the window. Oh, where *are* you?"

Running across the room in her fright, her foot caught in an old form lying on the floor, and she fell prostrate at his feet.

"My poor child, are you much hurt?" he whispered, lifting her up from the floor.

"No, no," she moaned, "only *do* find the ladder."

Supporting his now fainting burden on one arm, Graham felt around for the ladder, and mounting the frail stairway, reached the loft just as the wolf below, having torn down the old window shutter, tumbled headlong into the room, only to find that his prey had again escaped. Mad with disappointment and howling with rage, he tore up and down the room, snarling and gnashing his teeth in wild fury. From his post at the trap-door, Graham fired a random shot which silenced the brute forever.

"I believe I have sprained my ankle, Mr. Graham," said Ethel in a trembling voice, as she attempted to stand.

"Let me see," he replied, assisting her to a pile of rough boards. Removing the Polish boot, and ripping off the tiny gaiter under it, he found her surmise was correct; the foot was greatly swollen, and black and blue from the sprain.

"Poor child!" said he anxiously, as he wrapped it up in his soft cambric handkerchief. "This has

been anything but a happy termination to our pleasant ride for you. Do you know that you saved both our lives to-night by your bravery?"

"Don't praise me for my courage, for indeed I do not deserve it. I don't feel in the least like a heroine."

The frosty night air blew in strongly, and she shivered with the cold.

"You will turn into a veritable ice-maiden, if you sit there much longer; that airy party dress does not afford you much protection from this chilling air," said Graham, taking off his fur-lined overcoat. "I must insist upon your putting this on."

"I am not cold in the least, and I will not listen to such a thing," said Ethel, smiling, though her chattering teeth and shivering form belied her words.

Hearing no response to her remonstrance, she looked up, saying:

"Indeed, Mr. Graham, I had rather not put it on; you will need it yourself."

"Allow me to be a judge of that," he replied, in a voice of decision which she knew would brook no further refusal. So she submitted to his wrapping it around her, feeling a sense of quiet and intense enjoyment in being thus cared for. Nestling among the soft, warm folds of the cloak, she watched his tall form as he paced up and down the small apartment, vainly endeavoring to keep warm, for the wintry wind blew mercilessly in through the

sashless window. Thinking she was asleep, Graham did not disturb her by talking. The increasing pain in her foot, however, and the terrible excitement through which she had passed, prevented slumber from visiting Ethel that night, worn out with fatigue and suffering though she was.

Morning at last dawned; and as the first gray streaks of early twilight entered the room, Graham heard the jingle of bells, and hastening to the window, beheld with unspeakable relief Mr. Tremount's large sleigh approaching, with Tom, Mr. Kingsland, and Mr. Tremount in it. Taking Ethel in his arms, he carried her gently down the ladder, and the poor girl was soon clasped in her father's loving arms.

Mr. Tremount, on his return from Millford, had waited up long after the rest of the family had retired for Graham and Ethel. While looking out the window for them, he saw Selim dash up the wide carriage-drive, past the house to the stables, with the sleigh dragging after him on its side, and the reins trailing in the snow. Hurrying to the barn, he found the horse standing under a shed, his sides bleeding and lacerated, and his whole body trembling with terror. His worst suspicions were immediately awakened, and arousing Tom and Kingsland, he started in pursuit of the missing couple. Following Selim's track, which was readily discovered by traces of blood on the snow, they soon reached the school-house, and

were hailed by Graham from his post at the window.

Placing Ethel in the sleigh, Tom gave the reins to the horses, and in a short time she was in the arms of her anxious mother and sisters.

CHAPTER VI.

CHE SAIA SAIA.

"I WISH we could have a sleigh-ride this glorious afternoon," said Bessie, the following day after dinner. "Tom, why can't you order the large sleigh and give us a ride?" appealing to her cousin, who had just entered the library.

"I anticipated your wish some time ago, little woman, and the sleigh will be at the door in twenty minutes. I shall drive, so there will be plenty of room for all."

"Mr. Kingsland, are you not going with us?" said Miss Preston, with a bland smile, to Kingsland, who stood by the table drawing on his gloves.

"You will have to excuse me from accompanying you," he answered, coolly meeting the captivating glances she flashed at him.

"Oh, *pray* do not desert us," she said, beseechingly. "Mr. Ashton pleads guilty to a headache, and he has no particular *penchant* for sleigh-riding either; and judging from appearances, Mr. Graham bids fair to be held prisoner by Ethel's chains; so Maud and I shall be quite *desolé*, unless one of you gentlemen accompany us."

"I am not sufficient of a *preux chevalier* to make my presence of so much importance, I assure you. I have business appointments at Millford; otherwise I should consider myself unutterably happy to play the rôle of the 'gay Lothario,' or act in the capacity of target for whatever species of dart you choose to hurl at me, for I perceive you have your quiver well supplied this afternoon."

The young lady looked at him sharply, half inclined to suspect a covert irony under the pleasant tone and complimentary manner of the speaker; but he met her look so composedly, that she was quite nonplussed; so, turning from him, she advanced toward Graham, saying:

"Surely, Mr. Graham, *you* are not going to forsake us! Bessie, I suppose, will sit on the box with Mr. Clayton, and Maud and I certainly require a *vis-à-vis* to balance the sleigh."

"I should much prefer remaining at home with Miss Ethel, if she will allow me," he replied, coolly.

Miss Preston flushed and turned abruptly away.

"I think perhaps you had better go with the others," said Ethel, quickly.

Graham rose from his chair with a disappointed air; but catching the sweet, half-wistful smile on Ethel's face, his own brightened instantly, and bending down, he said in a low tone:

"If *I* cannot be with you, I leave as my substitute *Fidelitas*."

"Mr. Kingsland, if you think you can go with

us, we can stop at Millford for you to fulfil your business engagements," said Maud, after Miss Preston had left him. "If Loo is not more successful with Mr. Graham than she has been with you, she will be decidedly *distrait* with only my poor feminine society to enliven her."

Kingsland laughed. "Indeed, I wish I could postpone my engagements, but that is impossible. Besides stopping at Millford, I shall have to drive nine miles beyond. Why cannot you go with me?" he added, suddenly. "It will be a three-hour drive, but the sleighing is fine, and the moon will be rising as we return."

Maud hesitated for an instant, and colored brightly under the clear, earnest eyes upon her.

"Thank you, but Loo *never* would forgive me if I, too, should desert her, so I shall have to be excused. We shall see you this evening, I hope?"

"I may call on my return," he answered, somewhat puzzled to comprehend this new freak of interest with which Maud seemed to regard him.

"Then *au revoir*," she said, brightly, as the door closed upon him.

"Girls, ain't you ready?" cried Bessie, flying into the room. "Tom is at the door, and is scolding vigorously at your tardiness. He has been waiting two identical minutes."

"Mr. Ashton, you had better alter your mind and go with us. The cold, bracing air will prove an effectual cure for your headache," said Maud to

that gentleman, as she hurried from the room to dress for the ride.

He had been leaning against the mantel-piece, with a white look of suffering on his face, which made her heart relent. The young man stood for an instant as one stunned. It was the first time since his arrival at the Hall that she had voluntarily spoken to him in any other way than that which the most formal politeness required. Quickly recovering from his surprise, her bright smile and kind words decided him, and he was soon seated opposite the fair girl whose image still reigned uppermost in his heart.

Maud despised him too thoroughly to have asked him to join the party from the coquettish motives which might have swayed Miss Preston under similar circumstances. But her woman's heart was touched by the look of pain on his face, which a severe neuralgic headache had blanched to a deathly whiteness. The cold air, or Maud's unexpected kindness, worked the cure she predicted, and his frequent laugh, ready wit, and brilliant conversation, rendered him the animating spirit of the quartette behind the box. Bessie and Tom were too thoroughly engrossed with each other, and too much occupied with their own merry badinage, to pay any attention to the group behind them.

Graham's taciturnity and absent-mindedness provoked more than one stormy look and sarcastic remark from his indignant *vis-à-vis*. She had

employed every trick of coquetry, every art and device of which she was mistress, to bring him under her spell, but he remained as immovable to her dazzling shafts as the marble *Belvedere*, which Bessie declared might have been modelled from him. Finding the combined efforts of looks, tones, and manner, with which her battery was well fortified, unsuccessful, she leaned back among her furs and regarded with unutterable displeasure the handsome, imperturbed face before her.

After they had gone, Ethel threw herself back on the lounge, and resigned herself to the happy thoughts which Graham's tones and manner toward her had inspired within her breast. Her heart thrilled at the remembrance of the bright look he bestowed upon her at parting, and she seemed to attach a deeper meaning to the little golden ball which she held for one brief instant so lovingly to her lips, and then, as if ashamed of the act, hid quickly from her sight. Her blissful, dreamy reverie soon resolved itself into the more practical form of a nap, from which she did not awaken until a pair of mustached lips pressed her cheek, and caused her to open her eyes wide with astonishment.

"There, Ethel! I've earned a pair of gloves from you, and I hope you will be sufficiently conscientious as to remember your indebtedness," said Tom, retreating beyond her reach.

"Why, I must have fallen asleep!" she said, in a soft, sleepy voice, and rubbing her eyes. "When did you return?"

"We arrived about five minutes ago, and have been gazing with rapture at a very beautiful specimen of modern Sleeping Beauty reposing on a lounge," replied Tom.

"I wish you, too, could have enjoyed the sleigh-ride with us, this afternoon," said Maud, softly kissing her pale cheek.

"Yes, indeed!" chimed in Bessie, sitting on the edge of the sofa, and rubbing Ethel's warm little hands against her own cold ones. "I verily believe," she whispered, "that Mr. Graham missed you a thousand times more than any of us. He was in the most ecstatic spirits after seeing you wave your handkerchief to us from the window, but just as soon as we reached the old school-house, he became as solemn as an owl, and no amount of smiling and coquetting on Loo's part,—and she *really* did her best,—or my most sisterly attentions, could waken him from his melancholy reflections."

"Oh, hush! for mercy's sake, Bessie; I am sure he has heard every word you said," exclaimed Ethel, reddening, as she caught Graham's eye.

"Well, I don't care if he did; I am only telling you the truth."

"What is the truth?" said Tom, striding up to the sofa.

"Nothing that *you* ever said, my dear," said Bessie, tossing her muff in his face; "so you had better go and play the devoted in helping Loo off with her wrappings; I know she is dying to have you."

"I'll make you pay for that speech, my dear little sauce-box," replied Tom, trying to catch her. But springing past him, she flew around the library table, and rushed headlong into Kingsland's arms, who was entering the room.

"I beg your pardon!" she cried, breathlessly, as she recovered herself; and running past him, she sped upstairs, followed closely by Tom, who finally caught her as she tripped half-way up. Imprinting a kiss on her pouting lips, the report of which could be heard in the library, he said, triumphantly:

"Now, mademoiselle, I've caught you at last; remember, the next time you attempt to undervalue the veracity of your future lord and master, I shall claim payment in the same way—only with compound interest added. Will you recollect?"

"My future lord and master, indeed! I won't recollect any such nonsense at all, Mr. Tom, so you can just let me go. Besides, I think you had better be sure of securing your bird, before making any such ridiculous attempt to strangle her again," and freeing herself from his grasp, she ran upstairs to her room.

"Oh, this is but a feeble exhibition of the strength of my will and affections, pretty cousin, so beware in future," said Tom, with a provoking assumption of superiority.

Slamming the door in his face, Bessie locked it, and the young gentleman returned to the library.

Taking a seat by Miss Preston, he amused him-

self until supper-time in a tournament of words with that young lady, in which each gave and received sundry sharp stabs and stinging blows, to the no small amusement of Mr. Tremount, who was sitting by the fire, reading the morning paper, and now and then catching a word of their amiable conversation. She was displeased with Tom for disturbing a little *tête-a-tête* which she had contrived to inveigle Graham into before her enemy entered the room, and had brought the full battery of her charms and coquetries to play in her siege at his heart, which had thus far proved unsuccessful, judging from the polite indifference with which he languidly parried her pointed remarks. As Tom took a seat beside her, Graham arose, with rather more alacrity in his manner than he had evinced in his conversation, and walked over to the bay-window, where Ethel was standing. Taking a chair by the sofa, he said in a low tone, which Miss Preston endeavored in vain to catch :

"Miss Ethel, you have not asked me about my ride this afternoon."

"Why, there is no necessity, Mr. Graham ; the girls came home with glowing accounts of their charming sleigh-ride, so it is naturally to be supposed that you enjoyed it also."

"And why, pray, is it to be supposed that I had a good time, just because the others had ?"

"Judging from analogy ; if *they* enjoyed it, how could *you* have failed to do so ?"

"That is not logic at all," said Graham, laughing

pleasantly. "But I'll tell you the reason I did not have the time I had anticipated; shall I?"

"You can if you choose," replied Ethel, endeavoring to speak indifferently.

"It was because I missed you, Ethel. And as we passed the scenes of our disaster the other night, I could not help shuddering at the thoughts of the frightful danger in which my selfishness had placed you."

"Your selfishness! why, what do you mean?"

"We never would have been attacked by those brutes, if we had followed, as some suggested, immediately behind the large sleigh, but I wanted you all to myself, and lingered behind, till my thoughtlessness had almost proved fatal to us both."

"'Let the dead past bury its dead,'" said Ethel, trying to speak lightly, as she noticed the deep emotion expressed on Graham's face.

"That terrible night made me realize more fully than ever what you were to me; may I indulge the hope that I am not entirely indifferent to you?"

But Ethel had no time to reply, for Maud at that moment entered the library, looking surpassingly lovely in her long blue silk, which displayed to advantage her queenly form and beautiful complexion.

"Are you two fighting as usual?" she asked, turning to Tom Clayton and Miss Preston.

"Fighting is not a pretty word to use, sweet

cousin," said Tom, rising, and gallantly leading her to the sofa. "Miss Preston and I were merely discussing our descent from the monkeys, of which gentle race she thinks I am a noble scion. But she does not claim any relationship herself to my Darwinian ancestors, which I think is an unnecessary piece of cruelty to inflict on me. We are all brothers and sisters in charity" (with a serene smile to Miss Preston), "if in nothing else; and I think it quite a shame to leave her out of the fraternity, so far as our lineal descent from the ape is concerned; don't you, Maud?"

"I think Mr. Clayton might with great propriety learn a few lessons from some modern Chesterfield, and mend his manners a trifle," said Miss Preston, rising, as supper was announced. "He certainly exhibits some very striking characteristics of his forefathers, which might be vastly improved to the edification of his friends in general."

"In which precious list it is to be presumed you do not include yourself," retorted Tom.

"Hush, Tom! Do try and behave yourself for once," said Maud, leading the way into the dining-room. "Some of your polite speeches might, I think, be curtailed with some advantage to yourself, and not a little to Loo. You had better in future discuss some subject upon which you both agree, instead of forever quarrelling when you are together."

"Many thanks for your gentle reproof, faire

ladye; allow me forthwith to act upon the suggestion. Miss Preston, may I have the pleasure?"

Offering his arm, which she could not well refuse, he escorted the indignant young lady to the supper-table. He soon reconciled her to his position by her side, by making an apology, which, in spite of herself, she was obliged to laugh at and accept, from its very absurdity.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMAN'S RIGHTS.

THE next morning, Miss Preston and Bessie, accompanied by Tom and his friends, returned to New York. One snowy afternoon, a few days after their departure, Maud and Ethel were sitting in the library, talking over the events of the past week. The latter, stretched out on the crimson lounge, which she considered her special place of retreat, suddenly threw aside her worsted work, and exclaimed, with a sigh:

"Oh, Maudie, I *am* so tired of this hum-drum life. I wish I *could* do something great."

"What would you do if you could?" asked Maud.

"I'm sure I don't know, only I am just sick of this monotonous sort of life."

"We have had sufficient excitement for the past week to satisfy me, and *you* ought not to complain, for certainly your interesting adventure with Mr. Graham ought to last you for some time to come; it was rather romantic than otherwise."

"I don't see what there was in it to laugh at, if it was," said Ethel, vexed at her sister's laugh. "I don't mean that sort of thing at all. I will tell

you what I shall do when my ankle gets well. I am going to visit Aunt Mosely, in New York, and then I will connect myself with some woman's rights association, and *then* you will see if I cannot make some stir in the world."

"Doubtless you could, if eccentricity and an unwomanly desire for notoriety can make a stir in the world, as you call it. But the idea of you, of all persons in the world, pretending to set up for woman's rights, when I really do not believe you know anything about them. What would Mr. Graham say?"

"Probably the same that Mr. Kingsland would, were *you* to gratify any laudable desire which you may entertain for asserting your independence."

"Unfortunately, I cannot give him an opportunity for expressing his opinion on the subject; for at present, I have no desire whatever to extend my rights. I have plenty of them already, and know how to use them besides, and you do too, Ethel; so what *is* the use of wishing for more? It is a very absurd idea."

"I don't think so at all," answered Ethel, impatiently. "It provoked me beyond all endurance last night, when old Parson Steadman called. He condoled with me about my sprained ankle, and said he earnestly hoped I was setting the rest of you an example of Christian patience) as if you needed it) during my imprisonment,—which he evidently thought would be permanent, judging from his long-visaged and melancholy sigh, as mamma

recounted him our adventure the other night, and the fall which occasion my sprain. He piously informed me that these trials were sent us as a sort of discipline for our various sins and delinquencies—of which I have my share, goodness knows—and he trusted my true womanly spirit would bow meekly under the yoke, and submit as a *woman* ought to, without uttering a single murmuring or repining word. Pshaw! just as if," she added, scornfully, "a man had the right of bewailing his miseries on every street corner, like an old Pharisee, and letting the whole world know of his sorrows and deep afflictions, while we poor women are told to keep our mouths shut, lest a word of complaint should fall from them. Dear me! if the men could just learn to be a little more meek and submissive, it would be an improvement to humanity in general, and to him in particular."

"I think you ought to be more respectful in speaking of Mr. Steadman, Ethel," said Maud, reprovingly; "and if he did give you a few words of advice, it was because he thought you needed them, and this poor foot of yours was a good text on which to preach his sermon on womanly submission under trials. You have been very sweet and patient about it, dear, but as for this freak of standing up for woman's rights, it's simply ridiculous."

Ethel's ardor was rather dampened by this last remark of Maud's; she entertained a high regard for the opinion of her accomplished sister, but, not

to be daunted by the opposition she met with, she replied, with some asperity in her tone :

"Don't you think our intellect would be just as strong as man's, if it were cultivated and underwent the same training as his? If we were thrown on our own resources as early in life as some men are, I think, with an equally good education, we could occupy positions of usefulness, and fulfil our duties quite as acceptably as they."

"That may be true," returned Maud. "I acknowledge that there are many positions now usurped by men which rightfully belong to women. For instance, measuring out cloth by the yard, dealing out pins and needles, and haberdashery of every sort, is decidedly a woman's business; besides, a man might be much more profitably engaged in some manly, active pursuit, and leave such work to many a poor woman now earning a miserable pittance by the needle, when she might obtain a good salary and respectable livelihood if these situations were not now filled by men."

"That's precisely what I mean, and I really believe you think as I do after all."

"But I have not finished my speech yet," said Maud, laughing at Ethel's triumphant tone. "You spoke of our intellects being as strong as theirs. There you are decidedly wrong, and I for one am not ashamed to acknowledge it."

"Maud Tremount!" exclaimed Ethel, in astonishment," you don't mean to confess that you, with

all your learning and accomplishments, are not equal to—to—well, to Mr. Graham or Harold Kingsland?"

"I am speaking of men as *men*, or in the sense of a whole—not as individuals—and we may as well leave personalities alone. But Ethel, did you ever hear of a woman inventing a thing in your life?—except some new fashion in millinery or dress—or what woman ever discovered a new field in science, art, or literature?"

"Well, Maudie, to begin with, there are Miss Herschel and our own Miss Mitchell as astronmers; Rosa Bonheur, Miss Hosmer, and Miss Stebbins in painting and sculpture; Mrs. Somerville, Maria Edgeworth—and then just think of Mrs. Browning, and Madame Rècamier, and lots of others too numerous to mention, besides Zenobia, Semiramis, and Lady Montague, and—"

"O Ethel, *do* stop," interrupted Maud; "you perfectly overwhelm me. All those you have mentioned have excelled in the various pursuits towards which their genius was directed. Miss Hosmer and Miss Stebbins have done wonders in wielding the chisel; but you never heard of a sculptress yet whose works could compare in the slightest degree with the sublime productions of Phidias, Praxitiles, or any of those grand old Grecians. Rosa Bonheur has obtained a world-wide reputation as a painter, but in all ages of the world, can you mention the name of a single woman, whose works could approach in any re-

spect to the beautiful paintings of Raphael, Titian, or Corriggio ? "

" Well I'm sure, Maud, you cannot say anything disparaging of Mrs. Browning's genius as a poetess ? "

" I don't think I have uttered a disparaging remark about any you have spoken of. I gave them full credit for the genius they possessed, but I still contend that their genius is not as vast, nor as comprehensive, as man's. Mrs. Browning's is an exception ; her's was truly a masculine intellect, and any man, even Shakespeare himself, might be proud to claim *Aurora Leigh* as his. Did you ever hear of a woman writing a poem like *Paradise Lost*, or such a play as *Hamlet?* As for Madam Rècamier, she was a beautiful, accomplished woman, but chiefly remarkable for her brilliant wit and wonderful fascination of manner. Her *Letters* are indeed gracefully written, and display the cultivation of her mind, but I hardly think her name worthy to be classed with the great geniuses of the world."

" But you must recollect," answered Ethel, " that there has been but one Milton, one Shakespeare, and one Raphael. They have had innumerable imitators, but no equals, so I don't see why you should boast of the superiority of man's intellect and genius over woman's, as far as *they* are concerned."

" If there had been but one overpowering, all-commanding intellect in each class of genius

among men, there have been none at all among women," replied Maud, warmly.

Mrs. Tremount entering at this moment put an end to the girls' conversation, and Ethel was not sorry for the interruption. Many of her high-flown fancies, regarding the mission she was to accomplish, were already fading; and throwing herself back on the sofa with a sigh, she turned away her face from Maud and her mother, who were conversing by the fireside.

It was a gray, threatening afternoon, and Ethel looked out of the window into that

> "Noontide twilight which snow makes,
> With tempests of blinding flakes,"

with feelings of sadness and despondency which she never before had experienced. Cecil Graham's visit at Tremount Hall had not passed without leaving a strange impression on Ethel's heart. He possessed those qualities of mind and person which most women admire, and Ethel's young heart had not been proof against the fascination which his elegant figure, handsome face, and courtly address inspired, and vain were her efforts to banish him from her thoughts.

Suddenly a loud stamping of feet on the piazza was heard, and her father's hearty voice, calling for Maud in the hall, aroused her from her reverie.

"Why, papa, you look like the Ice King himself, with that snowy mantle on your shoulders," ex-

claimed Maud, running out to meet him. "Wait one minute, and I'll call Johnson to brush you off."

Turning to summon the old butler, she noticed Kingsland's tall figure standing in the doorway. He, too, was covered with snow; and his fur-cap, eyebrows, and heavy dark mustache, glistened with snow-flakes. Extending her hand to welcome him, she fairly winced as he pressed it in his firm grasp.

The two gentlemen, who had just returned from a political meeting at Millford, were speedily divested of their over-coats and wrappings, and accompanied Maud into the pleasant dining-room, where the table, covered with damask of dazzling whiteness, elegant silver, and dainty luxuries, tempted their keen appetites. After supper, the ladies retired to the bright fireside in the library, where the mysteries of crocheting and the intricacies of worsted patterns occupied their attention, leaving the gentlemen in the dining-room discussing the merits of their fragrant Havanas and the probable result of the meeting at Millford.

"Ethel," said Maud, looking up from her canvas, "why do you not go into the other room and talk politics with papa and Mr. Kingsland? I should not think you would be particularly interested in that feminine piece of fancy work, or be edified at all with mamma's or my conversation."

"I don't see why my love for fancy-work should

interfere with my views of woman's rights," said Ethel, coloring at Maud's sarcasm.

"So that was the subject of conversation which kept you girls so quiet this afternoon," said Mrs. Tremount, smiling. "I could not imagine what had become of my sunbeams, not hearing Maud singing through the house, nor Ethel's merry laugh."

"Well, mamma, Ethel and I were discussing the woman's rights question, of which she is a warm advocate," replied Maud.

"And what conclusion did you come to?"

"Why, Ethel thinks that our intellects and understandings are equal to man's; and with a proper cultivation, we can contend with him for fame and renown in the public walks of life. *I* think we are differently constituted every way from man; physically, we are not as strong. Of course there are some exceptions; for instance, in some of those villages in Germany, where women perform the whole work of a farm, and frequently show as much well-developed muscle as their gallant lords. Mentally, our minds are not as comprehensive—we cannot reach those heights of knowledge, or bring out of the vast store-houses of nature those riches of science which the great intellects of the world, the Newtons, Bacons, and Humboldts, have developed and produced. I think our perceptions and susceptibilities are keener, and our intuitions more acute, than man's. We frequently solve the truth, and arrive at conclu-

sions sooner, although without being able to explain exactly how we did it; while a man, on the other hand, will adopt the most roundabout course, and finally, after surmounting innumerable difficulties, reach the same result, but be able at the same time to give a reason for turning every corner and entering each little unnecessary nook in his circuitous route."

"Well, you are an enthusiast, Maud," said her father, who with Kingsland had been an unobserved listener at the library door. "What are you ladies talking about," he added, with an amused laugh, as he noticed the glow of excitement on the expressive face of his beautiful daughter. She was sitting in a low chair by the table, and the bright light of the astral lamp shed a soft radiance over her face and figure, deepening the purple of her violet eyes, and tinging the gold-brown of her hair with a richer hue.

"Oh, do come to my rescue, dear papa," cried Ethel. "We're talking about woman's rights, and Maud's been delivering a long tirade about our not having any."

"And what do you think, my pet?" asked her father, patting her cheek.

"Why, I stand up for the rights and privileges of my sex, *of course*," replied Ethel.

"And which side of this disputed question do you adopt, Miss Maud?" inquired Kingsland, taking a seat on the sofa directly opposite her.

Coloring brightly, she answered, with a be-

witching little smile that made his heart beat faster:

"I confess, Mr. Kingsland, that there are a few great geniuses among men who tower aloft among the race, shining, like the sun, by their own inherent light, while the beauty and majesty of the moon and planets, among which I class our precious selves, owe their brightness to them."

"In other words, you mean that we shine by reflected light," said Ethel, scornfully.

"It's a fact, nevertheless, my dear, and we cannot gainsay it, do what you will," replied her sister, with a merry laugh. "The peculiar intellect requisite to invent the steam-engine, the telegraph, and such things, I yield gracefully to man, as well as the self-command and bravery that controls senates, inspires the warrior, and in fact performs most of the activities of life. Besides, Ethel, first think that it is *we* that awaken these glorious aims and the aspirations of poets, sculptors, soldiers, and statesmen, and we may as well rest content with touching the chords which vibrate the harmonies that astonish the world."

"My goodness, Maud, I think that you are waxing a trifle conceited as well as eloquent," responded Ethel.

"Rather a humiliating interruption, Ethel," said Maud, gayly. "But to resume, and descend from the sublime to the practical: I think that just as soon as we can invent a sewing-machine or a stocking-knitter, batter down fortifications with rams

or the great guns of the day, or bore tunnels through the Alps, *then* it is time for us to assert our rights, go to the polls and vote, speak in senate, and run as candidates for the Presidency."

"Well," said Ethel, quickly, "if you owned blocks of city houses and other kinds of real estate, you would be taxed as much for your property as the great landholders themselves, and yet you would have no voice in public affairs at all."

"I acknowledge our right to vote, and I don't believe in taxation without representation, as the old colonists used to have it, any more than you do; all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient, says St. Paul, and I do not think it expedient for us to assert this right at present. Besides," she added, laughingly, and darting an arch glance at Kingsland and her father, "we have plenty of privileges now, and it has been decided by the acclamation of all poets from Homer down, that we are angels, and if we claim the prerogative of invention and of metaphysics, the ruling of arms, or the government of nations, only think what incongruous mortals we would be, with such a combination of the earthy and celestial in our nature! Why, we would be both men and angels, and who ever heard of such an anomaly in the history of mankind?"

Kingsland, who had been watching the varying color and changing expression on Maud's face with some interest, turned toward her with an amused smile on his handsome face, saying:

"Miss Maud, if my memory serves me right, all the angels that ever appeared in Scripture were represented under the form of men."

"It was right and proper that they should," returned Maud; "they had offices to perform which were much more suitable for men than for women. For instance, the angel who appeared before Abraham and told him to sacrifice his only son, delivered a message which a woman's heart would shrink from. The angel at the gate of Paradise, with the flaming sword to guard the entrance, would have been a strange creature had he been personated by a woman; and I think that Lot's wife would have objected more strenuously than she did to leaving her home, though it's doom was hastening, had she thought that woman's hands were compelling her to leave the devoted city."

"I think, Maud dear," said Mrs. Tremount, "that you are assuming too much of the angelic nature to be ours. To be sure, we have had our feelings flattered and our praises sung in poetry and song for ages past, but these heavenly beings, so adored, when put to the practical tests of life, display quite as much of the earthy element in their disposition as the angelic. As for our intellects and understandings being inferior to man's, we cannot but acknowledge the fact, and to my mind there is nothing degrading in the thought. Man climbs the heights of fame, and stands there secure in the adulations of the multitude. The responsibilities of genius are his, but is he any happier than

one who sheds around the halo of a godly example and ministers to the sorrows of the tried ones? Woman's sphere is entirely different in its unostentatious influence from man's; she does not hew down the forests, chain the lightning, nor guide the destinies of nations, but her influence is quite as important and necessary to the happiness of the world, as that of the man of genius whose star she is; she brightens and encourages him in his aspirations after fame. Do you remember Milton's beautiful lines:

> "'For contemplation he and valor form'd,
> For softness she, and sweet, attractive grace.'"

"But mamma," said Ethel, "you must acknowledge that women have done much in all ages in influencing the destinies of nations. There are Madame De Stäel and Madame Roland, besides any number of other women, who have had their share in the downfall of empires."

"Yes, dear, women have done much in all ages to bring on wars and bloodshed, by interfering in the political affairs of a nation. Madam De Stäel, the intriguing Chevreux, and Madame Roland did very much toward altering the destinies of France, possessed as they all were with almost masculine intellect, a desire to do something for her welfare, and a most insatiable thirst for fame. The latter, with many other women of rank and influence, lowered their own womanhood, and hastened, if they did not actually occasion, one of the most

bloody and fearful revolutions recorded in history. And Madame De Stäel, under the first empire, in her unceasing efforts to thwart the ambitious designs of Napoleon, enjoyed but a few quiet hours in a life which was full of clouds and storms. Exiled from her beloved Paris, with no sweet influences of home and its sanctities to bind her; an atheist in belief, and living only for the pleasures which a brilliant intellect afforded; she died, without one thought of the great unknown future which lay beyond. Her wonderful genius no one ever questioned; her *Corinne* is imperishable, and some of her works on politics and legislation display a comprehension of the difficulties under which France was then laboring, equal to that of the most astute and sagacious statesmen of the time. But how much more lasting would have been her influence, had she been satisfied to exert her great genius within the quiet precincts of home, shedding around her, and on all who came within the circle of her sphere, the influence of a lofty, Christian patriotism, undaunted by the storms raging around her, leaving politics and the intrigues of war to the statesman and warrior, and contenting herself in using her influence in the cause of justice and humanity."

"Really, Marion, I think you would make an excellent speaker yourself, in the forum," said Mr. Tremount, as his wife finished speaking. "Have you not mistaken your vocation?"

"No, indeed!" she replied, emphatically. "I

love my home, husband, and children too well, ever to sully my hands with the politics of the day. But I think we have discussed this matter long enough. Maud, suppose we have some music?"

"Willingly, dear mamma; what shall I play for you?" answered her daughter, as she opened the piano.

"Sing that lovely little *Letter Song* from *La Perichole*," interposed Ethel; "I know Mr. Kingsland will like it."

Maud felt much inclined to scold Ethel soundly for having mentioned this solo. Kingsland had asked her some weeks previous in her sister's presence to learn it for him, which she had very ungraciously declined to do. She had learned it, nevertheless, and now noticed with anger and mortification the look of triumph in Kingsland's eyes as he placed the music before her. Seating herself at the piano, her cheeks flushed with displeasure, she commenced to sing with an air of perfect indifference, but soon forgetting her annoyance in the beauty of the song, her rich soprano rose clear and sweet, entrancing all her listeners. Kingsland, an enthusiast himself in music, leaned spell-bound over the piano, as Maud, forgetful of all around her, continued her beautiful strains of melody. In the next song, he joined her with his rich tenor, and their fine, cultivated voices mingled in pure harmony, accompanied occasionally by Ethel's sweet contralto. The evening passed

quickly and pleasantly, and as the clock struck eleven, the girls rose to retire. As Maud was leaving the room, she encountered the dark eyes of Kingsland bent upon her with an expression which set every nerve quivering. Blushing deeply, she hastily passed him with a low "good-night," and ran up to her room.

Though he had never renewed his suit since her unreasonable rejection of his love in the summer, the delicate little attentions which he occasionally bestowed upon her during the fall were unmistakable proofs of his continued attachment. Of late, however, a courtly but almost indifferent manner had taken the place of his former devotions, much to Maud's chagrin, for, womanlike, she did not object to his admirations and attentions, if he did not annoy her with protestations of love.

CHAPTER VIII.

LE BEAU IDEAL.

AFTER Ethel was in bed, and Maud was toasting her feet before the little wood-fire, looking lovelier than ever in her long, white wrapper, with her wavy golden hair hanging in heavy masses over her shoulders, the former suddenly exclaimed:

"Maud, what possesses you to treat Harold Kingsland so shabbily?"

"Why, I do not," she answered, carelessly, though her heart throbbed quickly at the question. "I merely treat him as he deserves; besides, my dear, did you ever hear that

"'Too light winning makes the prize light'?"

"That is all nonsense, and if you are not careful, he will desert you entirely. He is a splendid man, and as far as mind and person go, I don't know what more you could desire."

"Why do you not set your own cap for him?"

"Oh, Maud, how ridiculous you are. You know very well he only *likes* me. But seriously, why can't you love him?"

"I am perfectly aware of all his mental and personal perfections, and I really think if he *would*

be just a little less persistent, and a trifle more audacious, his commendable efforts might possibly be crowned with success."

"I am sure I don't think you need worry yourself on the score of persistency any longer," replied Ethel, sarcastically, "for if I am not mistaken, he has not annoyed you with his importunities, or treated you with any special attention for the past four months. As for his audacity, you will find that he possesses plenty of that quality, if he ever intends making you his wife."

Maud colored deeply and made no reply, for she felt the truth of Ethel's blunt remarks more keenly than she cared to acknowledge.

"I do wish you would tell me what sort of a man would suit you," resumed her sister. "Certainly all your beaux—excuse the word, for I don't know what else to use—have been fine, manly fellows, with the exception of that conceited little coxcomb, Augustus Howes, whose precious self you could twist around your finger like a ribbon. You surely will take up with some awfully crooked stick some of these days if you are so particular."

"'The fishes still a-swimming
Are just as luscious, every way,
As those that sissed and sputtered
In the saucepan yesterday,'"

sang Maud, laughingly, looking up.

"But you will get out of bait before long, and not be able to catch them. What possible objec-

tion can you bring against Guy Ashton, and George Temple, or—"

"It is not agreeable to have such a catalogue of names brought up so pointedly," interrupted Maud; "but as you have mentioned them, I will just tell you why I could not accept their *undying* affections, on condition that the disagreeable subject may never be mentioned again between us, for I am heartily sick of being teased about them. As for Guy Ashton, God made him, therefore let him pass for a man; with all his elegant figure, and easy, polished manner, he is the most consummate flirt I ever knew. His heart is as utterly devoid of all true, noble sentiment toward women, as he is deficient in those athletic sports which I consider manly and becoming. I do not believe he could row a boat to save his life; he would surely catch crabs or swamp the boat if he made the attempt. He visited me last winter in town, for the sole purpose of winning my affections, only to let them drop like hot cakes as soon as another new face came along. But he was severely vanquished, and without much ceremony, too; for absurdly infatuated and fascinated as I was at the time with his attentions, when I discovered his true character I did not feel one atom of pity when I rejected his proposals with the scorn they deserved. I suppose he did love me as much as he was capable of loving anything besides himself and money, but doubtless the wound in his heart—if he ever had one—is healed

by this time, and he is probably going about seeking whom he may devour this winter."

"If the poor man could hear your amiable ejaculations, he would doubtless fall completely annihilated. Are your feelings equally tender towards George Temple?"

"Oh, he is an extremely agreeable young man, excellent company for a picnic excursion, and handy in mounting me on horseback. But he has quite too much of that *naïveté*—very interesting in girls, no doubt—to suit me, and he is not tall enough either; besides, as he is only a year older than I, consequently I am five in advance of him in experience at least."

"Indeed! that is a mathematical problem which I do not quite comprehend."

"You will when you arrive at my years of discretion," said Maud, serenely. "But to continue. Are you sleepy, Ethel?" as her sister yawned.

"Not particularly; resume your remarks."

"I do feel a sort of sisterly regard for the youth, for one can scarcely help loving him for his affectionate, boyish ways and pretty face; so if you or Bess will condescend to smile upon him, I will receive him gladly—as a brother."

"Thank you; I'm not partial to cast-off garments."

"Well, somebody must take them, or nobody would ever be married in the world. If *some* women would not marry somebody else's rejected lovers, just think how many old bachelors there

would be moping about; they could outnumber the spinsters in a very short time, and goodness knows there are plenty of old maids in the world. But then, Ethel dear, you need not take Mr. Temple on my recommendation, if you do not love him, for I would infinitely prefer calling Cecil Graham brother."

Reddening at her sister's unexpected allusion to Mr. Graham, Ethel dropped her head on her pillow, but curiosity overcoming her feelings, she looked up again, saying:

"Maudie, if you won't have Mr. Ashton, nor George Temple, nor that dear little Miss Nancy, Gussie Howes, nor his majesty, Mr. Kingsland, who, for goodness' sake, *will* you have? Do have the kindness to describe your *beau-ideal* to me, and possibly I may capture some wandering knight, who may suit your fastidious ladyship."

"I will preface my confession with the remark, that I believe I am too particular," returned Maud.

"Of that interesting fact your audience is sufficiently aware without being told; but proceed."

"Of course," continued Maud, "I do not expect perfection, for *that* is impossible; every one has his faults and failings, but I think when a man and woman marry, there are several requisites on the part of each which I consider absolutely essential to the happiness of both. He should be stronger mentally (no interruptions, if you please) as well as physically; he should command her *respect* as well as *love*, and—don't breathe a word of

it—if she entertain a little wholesome *fear* of her liege lord, methinks she would love him better still. What I admire, and should demand in my husband, are power, strength of will, good judgment, high principles, manliness, constancy, and true nobility of soul."

"Mercy! Maud, how extravagant you are; and do you expect to find all those perfections combined in one poor mortal man?"

"It's possible, if it is not probable," replied Maud, blandly. "Is it not Tennyson who says:

> "'How'er it be, it seems to me
> 'Tis only noble to be good;
> Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood'?"

"I don't see how those lines apply to *your* paragon," interposed Ethel, "for *he* certainly does not belong to the common run of humanity."

"Good looks are desirable," proceeded Maud, without noticing the irony, "everybody knows that, and I would much prefer that my future lord should be handsome and stylish; but then if I loved him I should not allow his looks, were they not very prepossessing, to interfere with my acceptance of him. You may rest assured, however, that I should take special pains not to fall in love with a *very* homely man, and if such a lamentable catastrophe ever should happen, it would be because, as good Doctor Steadman would piously say, it was foreordained from all eternity that such should be my fate."

"'Winged Cupid is painted blind,'" sang Ethel, "and your theory in regard to looks may all be very commendable and proper, but I wonder what the practice of it would be, if some of these days you should fall into the snare of the naughty little god, and find that you had been captured by some real vegetable lover, with a pumpkin face, carroty hair, turnip nose, gooseberry eyes, asparagus mustache, and—"

"Spare me, immortals, spare!" interrupted Maud, tragically clasping her hands, and looking pathetically up to the ceiling. "How *can* you lacerate my feelings so horribly? I do not believe you can possibly find anything in the vegetable kingdom to compare his chin with, unless it be a squash, which is not pretty, so we may as well leave such beautiful comparisons alone. But I think a reasonable amount of good looks desirable, do not you?"

"I don't know what your elevated ideas of 'a reasonable amount of good looks' are, and I am entirely too sleepy to talk any more. It is one o'clock by my watch, and unless you get into bed soon and go to sleep, we will both look like bats in the morning."

"A very original comparison, if it is not very *àpropos*," said Maud, putting out the light; and kissing her sister good-night, she nestled in beside her, and soon both girls were wandering in dream-land.

CHAPTER IX.

DRIFTS AND DEVELOPMENTS.

"MAUD, there comes Mr. Kingsland to give you a sleigh-ride," said Ethel, as the jingle of bells attracted her attention to the window the following afternoon.

"Nonsense, Ethel! he never would dream of such a thing as driving Saladin after such a storm as we had last night. Why, I do not suppose any but the main roads are broken in the least."

"*Nous verrons.* I know from his looks he has come for that purpose," replied Ethel peeping out from behind the lace curtains. "He has gotten himself up regardless, and I actually believe has bought new silver bells for this special occasion. *Do* come and look at him, Maud; the horse, sleigh, and *tout ensemble* look just like a story-book description of a lord calling upon his lady-love."

"It is utterly preposterous for you to talk so," said Maud, laughingly; she longed to run to the window also, but pride detained her. At that moment she heard a knock at the door.

"*Monsieur Kingsland, pour Mademoiselle Maud,*" said Adèle, handing her a card as she opened it.

"Oh dear, what shall I do? Won't you go down too, Ethel?

"Indeed I will not. I'm not anxious to play *Madame de Trop* for anybody's benefit," answered her sister, with a teasing laugh.

Maud walked leisurely down the long stairway, and as she entered the drawing-room Kingsland stepped forward, saying earnestly:

"Will you not take a drive with me this afternoon, Miss Tremount? The roads present rather a forbidding aspect, but the air is fine, and it is positively bewilderingly beautiful to drive among the fir-trees down the avenue, and along the road. They are heavily laden with snow, and the picture they present as the sun slants through their boughs is wondrously fine."

Maud was somewhat taken aback at the equivoval compliment conveyed in the invitation, but, having no excuse to offer for refusing, she accepted it with a gracious smile, and hastened upstairs to prepare for the drive. As she entered the room, Ethel exclaimed, with a laugh:

"Well, I suppose you are going? What did my lord say?"

"I think he is more desirous of taking me out to see the evergreens loaded down with snow—which is *such* a novelty in this region, you know—than from any pleasure he expects to derive from my society."

"He certainly knows how to give an invitation *en régle*," said Ethel, who was still standing by

the window. "I just saw his coachman put a hot brick in the sleigh for your tender footies to repose on, and that white bear's robe is new too. Dear me!"

"Good-by, Ethel; you can pay your devotions at the shrine of *Fidelitas* during my absence," said Maud, running downstairs.

Kingsland helped her into the sleigh, and tucking the snowy robes snugly around her, took his seat beside her, and seizing the reins, gave the word, and Saladin dashed off down the avenue. Turning off from the main road after they had passed the entrance, Kingsland drove into a less-frequented lane, in which the snow was barely trodden. High drifts lay piled up on either side, completely covering the fence, while the narrow path in the centre showed but little evidence of recent travel, there being but a few faint traces to mar the pristine whiteness of the snow, as it lay pure and glistening in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. Saladin, though a large and powerful horse, strained every sinew and muscle as he ploughed his way through, kicking up a cloud of sparkling crystals behind him. Maud glanced at the strong, handsome profile of her companion; she wondered what had possessed him to bring her over this heavy, untrodden road, and mentally resolved not to be the first to break the silence which had sealed their lips since they started, feeling somewhat indignant at the taciturnity of her driver, and at the same time

filled with curiosity as to the reason of his selecting the route they were following.

Kingsland interrupted her reflections by turning quickly, and catching the puzzled, half-provoked expression on her face, said, with a laugh:

"Well, Miss Tremount, here we have been driving a mile and a half over this execrable road, and you have not asked what induced me to bring you hither. Where is your woman's curiosity?"

"Just where Saladin's is, for I fancy he has wondered quite as much as I why you chose this wretched road for a drive."

"I came out here for the purpose of working off an extra amount of mettle of which my horse has had a superabundance during the past week, as well as to dispel a certain feeling of what psychologists would call *moodiness*, which has afflicted me this past day or two. Do you know there is no remedy equal to the bright, strong, sympathatic presence of another to drive away one's gloomy thoughts?"

Maud's cheeks paled beneath the earnest eyes, and her fingers worked nervously within the friendly concealment of her muff, as she answered, in a low voice:

"I did not know that *moodiness* was one of your characteristics."

"It is not; but for some reason, which your woman's keenness has already solved, the pathway of my life seems just now to be as rough and repellent as this over which we are now travelling. The

goal is not far off, perhaps; but however distant it may be, it *never* will be reached until I gain possession of the one object which alone can make my life happy, and which is not yet within my grasp."

Maud felt as if the sword of Damocles were suspended over her. She was drawn by the deepest, tenderest feelings of her nature toward this strong man beside her, as he laid bare the longings of his heart; at the same time, the determination expressed in his tone as he declared his indomitable purpose to gain his object, whatever obstacle lay in his path, aroused a feeling of antagonism which entirely counterbalanced all things else. She felt his eyes upon her, and knew she must say or do something; so leaning forward, she said, half-impatiently:

"Will you permit me to take the lines, Mr. Kingsland? I should like to drive this spirited horse of yours."

"He pulls too hard, and would tire you out before we had gone a hundred yards."

"Never mind; I wish to drive him."

Kingsland handed her the reins, and watched her with a curious smile as she wound them around her hands. The horse felt the lighter hand on his mouth, and instantly quickened his gait, making such long, jerking strides through the deep snow, as threatened every instant to turn the sleigh over.

Maud was conscious that Kingsland was watching her, and every nerve and fibre of her being quivered with excitement. The keen winter air deepened the crimson in her cheeks, and her eyes

blazed like living sapphire, as she strained every muscle to keep the foaming horse within bounds. They had driven some distance in utter silence ; a few hundred yards beyond was a cross-road, at the intersection of which were hugh drifts of snow which the wind had swept over from the adjacent fields. Maud's quick eye took in the situation at a glance, and she felt a strange sinking at her heart as the horse plunged down the hill through the deepening drifts. Her hands trembled as she felt the strength gradually leaving her arms, though she still retained a seemingly firm grasp on the reins. She was determined not to ask assistance from her companion, though the danger ahead appeared inevitable. Kingsland was equally resolved not to assist her, being well aware that an upset in the snow would be the best way to bring the wilful young lady to terms, and would not hurt either of them.

Maud was ready to cry with excitement and vexation as she felt her own helplessness. As they approached the cross-road, the horse, feeling the slackening rein, plunged madly forward, and sank up to his shoulders into the very centre of a deep drift, turning the sleigh and its occupants into the snow.

As soon as she could disengage herself from the buffalo robes, she strove to regain her footing, but at each attempt sank helplessly back into the yielding snow. Tired out with her exertions, she finally sat still, looking in despair at the wall of snow surrounding her. Kingsland was nowhere

to be seen, having disappeared over the other side of the fence when the sleigh turned over. To add to the predicament, she was in close proximity to the horse, who was kicking up the snow in a cloud over her, in his frantic efforts to free himself. At this juncture, Kingsland's head emerged from the snow, and, on perceiving Maud quietly seated, with her hands clasped on her knees, the very picture of passive despair, his fine eyes flashed with merriment, and the quizzical smile which played around the corners of his mustache broadened into a laugh, as he exclaimed :

"Well, Miss Tremount, this dilemma proves the correctness of the old saying, that woman is

> "'A creature not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food,
> For freaks, and whims, and wilful wiles,
> For contradiction's tears and smiles.'"

"'*Poeta nascitur non fit;*' certainly not made to suit any occasion, and your ungallant perversion in that second couplet of Wordsworth's beautiful poem shows that parody is not *your* forte," she retorted, with heightened color.

"All of which is not very *àpropos* to my remark," said Kingsland, with a comical attempt to control his risibles. He felt in no hurry to assist the fair speaker from her snowy surroundings, and quite enjoyed her pretty look of vexation, as she looked helplessly up at him. The snow, which had powdered her hair, lashes, and eyebrows, added not

a little to the striking beauty of feature and coloring, and the appealing look which she cast at him from those blue, upturned eyes was too uncommon and irresistible, not to be thoroughly appreciated. Saladin, in the meanwhile, had been gradually lessening the snowy barrier between Maud and himself, so that Kingsland was actually forced to disturb the pretty tableau. Trampling down the snow around her, he helped her to her feet, and then, before she was aware of his intentions, he lifted her out of the drift, and carried her some distance through the snow to the road, where he deposited her, too much overwhelmed with astonishment to breathe a word of expostulation.

It was with great difficulty that he could extricate Saladin from the drift, and required his utmost strength, as well as considerable agility of muscle, to avoid the flying hoofs of the animal, as he kicked and plunged violently in his vain efforts to free himself from the powerful hand on his rein. As Maud watched his master rearrange the sleigh and harness, a smile of amusement at her late ludicrous predicament overspread her face, and as Kingsland plodded through the snow toward her, leading the horse by the bridle, she met him with a merry laugh, saying:

"If you do not shake off the snow from your hat and coat, Mr. Kingsland, papa will think that Ethel and I are doomed to meet some disaster in the way of upsets, at the hands of our cavaliers when out sleigh-riding; and besides, I have no de-

sire that this episode of ours should be known by the household. I certainly should never hear the last of it from Tom."

"It shall be kept *sub rosâ*, then, if you like," answered Kingsland, smiling, and shaking off his hat and coat. "But I ask again, do you not now think that this display of muscle on your part, proves the aptness and force of my quotation?"

"Indeed I do not; but I *do* think that it proves that

> "'Man's an odd compound after all,
> And ever has been since the fall.'

For if it had not been for this truly masculine freak of yours in taking this road, I should not have had the pleasure of playing the rôle of 'patience on a monument,' or more correctly speaking, in a snow-drift, and you would not have had occasion to use your brachial muscles in my behalf."

"I assure you I should not object to another opportunity to employ them for your benefit," he answered, smiling, as he helped her into the sleigh. "Would you like to drive home?"

He asked the question without the faintest conception that she would comply, but to his infinite surprise, she answered quietly, though with a slightly defiant ring in her voice:

"You anticipate my wishes readily, Mr. Kingsland. I was just about to ask you for the lines," and taking them from him, she drove the remainder of the way home.

Kingsland began to think that there was more

depth to woman-nature, and particularly to that of the pretty specimen beside him, than he had before dreamed of in his philosophy. Leaning back in the sleigh, he watched her with mingled feelings of amusement, surprise, and curiosity, as she drove the now thoroughly tired horse homeward. The occasional touch of the whip, which he seldom used, would start the horse at a brisker pace, throwing the occupants of the sleigh forward toward the dashboard. The frequent repetition of these little incidents forcibly reminded him of sundry rides in a Broadway omnibus when the streets were piled with uneven heaps of snow and ice, causing the cumbrous vehicle to pitch and roll like a ship at sea, jostling the passengers, and pitching them forward in the unceremonious manner peculiar to New York omnibuses.

"I know you have had a lovely time," said Ethel, as Maud walked into the bright library where her mother and sister were sitting. "Tell us all about it."

"Certainly I had. *Mais, je ne pent pas vous dire le tout,*" answered Maud, laughing, as she loosened her furs.

"You know very well that *I* would tell you everything if I had been in your place," returned Maud, quickly; "unless—unless—"

"Unless your *Romeo* happened to employ the occasion to offer you his heart and hand," interrupted Maud. "Well, I am sorry that I cannot entertain you with an account of any such roman-

tic experience. But really, the circumscribed limits of the sleighing, the clouds of snow constantly flying in our faces from Saladin's heels, to say nothing of the atrocious condition of the roads, rendered the display of *la passion tendresse*, which, I believe, is the regulation thing under such circumstances, simply impossible."

"Is Mr. Kingsland going to return to tea?" asked her mother.

"Yes. Papa is talking of erecting a library, town hall, or some sort of public building in Millford, and has asked Mr. Kingsland to draw up the plans. They are in the study now, and I should not be surprised if he had to stay overnight. The sky became overcast at sunset, and I think we will have another storm to-night."

"Then I shall be a prisoner another Sunday," said Ethel, who was still obliged to remember that her ankle was not entirely well.

"I fancy Dr. Steadman will have a slim audience to-morrow," said Maud, "for if we have another fall of snow to-night, no creature, but one with legs of antediluvian magnitude, could ever plod through much deeper snow than that which now covers the roads."

"If you expect to change your dress for supper, dear, you had better run up now, for it will be ready in a few minutes," said Mrs. Tremount, stepping forward to greet Kingsland, who was entering the room with her husband.

CHAPTER X.

THE BRIDGE OF CONTENTION.

ABOUT three-quarters of a mile from the Hall was a pretty gothic chapel, with stained-glass windows and belfry tower, from which hung the beautiful bell—Kingsland's gift—whose soft, silvery chimes rung out musically over the woods and fields, summoning the children of the farmers, and men employed on the estate, to the Sunday-school which Maud and Ethel conducted every Sunday afternoon.

After dinner, the following day, Maud started out alone, and walking briskly through the garden, followed a rounding path through the woods, and soon reached the chapel. On entering the vestibule, a crowd of eager children immediately surrounded her, each one clamoring for her hand and books. Smiling kindly on the little group, she led the way to the farther end of the chapel, and took her seat. The little girls, with their bright-colored dresses and glowing cheeks, and the sturdy boys of every age, formed a pretty picture, as they gathered around their beautiful teacher, listening with earnest, upturned faces to the gentle words of instruction which fell from her lips. The sun

streamed in through the stained-glass windows, flooding the little chapel with a crimson light, and rested like a halo over Maud's head, as she leaned lovingly over her little flock.

Kingsland, who had remained overnight at the Hall, owing to the severity of the storm, had noticed Maud leaving the house, and keeping at a respectful distance, followed her hither. Stepping quietly within the chapel, he stood in the doorway, his tall form concealed by one of the pillars of the arch, and watched, with a mixture of love, admiration, and jealousy, Maud's expressive face as she taught her little scholars.

The creaking of the floor, as he moved his position, caught her ear. Raising her eyes, she saw Kingsland, who, finding concealment no longer possible, stepped forward, saying, as he took a seat beside one of the children :

" Will you permit me to play scholar for a little while, Miss Tremount ? "

" We have finished the lessons, but you can help us in the singing," she replied quietly, though she colored deeply as she met his eye.

Kingsland joined in the song with his rich tenor voice, to the great delight of the children, for they entertained a most profound respect and admiration for the handsome gentleman before them.

After dismissing the children, Maud walked quickly down the aisle, followed closely by Kingsland. As she turned to lock the door of the chapel, the key slipped from her hand and fell into a min-

ature snow-drift near the steps. Stooping down, Kingsland thrust his hand into the snow, and after hunting around for some time, succeeded in finding it. Locking the door, he returned the key to Maud, saying :

"There is another key I wish you would give me possession of some time."

"Which is it?" she inquired, looking up innocently.

"Would you really like me to tell you?" he asked, bending down with a bright gleam in his eyes which made her heart throb.

In an instant his meaning flashed across her mind. Provoked at her own obtuseness, and mortified at having given him an opportunity to recur to the dreaded subject, she expressed her annoyance by quickening her steps, and hurrying over the scarcely beaten snow-path at a pace that astonished Kingsland. Anxious to shorten the walk as much as possible, she took the nearest direction toward home, and led the way over a narrow path that ran along the banks of a stream eight or ten feet wide. It was a pretty spot in summer ; the waters laughing and gurgling in their pebbly bed, the moss-covered banks studded with violets, and the overarching bows of the elms, as they met and drooped gracefully over the stream, combined to form a spot of beauty and repose, to which the sisters at the Hall often resorted during the warm summer days. Now, however, all was changed, and winter robed the stream and its banks, and

the dark woods beyond, in its mantle of snow and ice—

> "Every pine and fir and hemlock
> Wore ermine too dear for an earl,
> And the poorest twig on the elm-tree
> Was ridged inch-deep with pearl."

Rugged blocks and lumps of ice were piled up in confused masses on either bank of the stream, while the turbid waters, swollen by fall rains and recent thaws, swept tumultuously through the narrow channel a few feet wide in the middle. The graceful rustic bridge with its tempting seats, had been carried away, and Maud saw to her great dismay that one narrow beam alone spanned the stream to serve the purpose of a bridge.

Kingsland, placing his foot upon it, saw that it would prove but an insecure footing, and turning to Maud, said:

"Had we not better return home by the road? That beam is too slippery and unsafe for you to venture over it, and the other path is unbeaten."

"The snow is deep, and the walking tiresome that way, and we would not get home till after dark," replied Maud, with a look of vexation on her face.

"There is no other alternative; the old road is well trodden, I think, and I would suggest that we retrace our steps immediately, for as you just remarked, it will be quite dark before we reach the Hall."

Maud surveyed with displeasure the unaccomo-

dating little bridge; observing a slight smile on Kingsland's face, she said, shortly:

"The other way is very much farther, and I want to get home as soon as possible."

"Would it be very disagreeable for you to endure my company an hour longer?" he returned, as he picked up her books, which had fallen on the snow.

Irritated at his question, and feeling for some inexplicable reason a resentment at his imperturbed manner, she replied, hastily:

"It would indeed, Mr. Kingsland; your presence is endurable only because it is forced."

"Your present actions do not seem quite consistent with the precepts and doctrines you endeavored to inculcate into the minds of those children this afternoon."

"When I feel the need of reproof, sir, I will request it," she replied, angrily. "If you desire to go home by the road, pray do so; *I* prefer returning this way."

"And *I* prefer that you should not," he answered striving to detain her; but eluding his hand, she sprang lightly past him, and was half-way over the plank, when a sudden trembling seized her as it shook beneath her feet. Springing forward into the middle of the stream, Kingsland caught her in his arms as her foot slipped off the plank; with difficulty maintaining his footing in the rushing waters, he succeeded in gaining the opposite bank, and deposited her without much ceremony on the ground. Provoked at her wilfulness, which feeling

was not lessened by the uncomfortable condition of his nether garments, now rapidly congealing in the frosty air, he said, sternly :

" The *next* time you desire to cross such a frail structure as that, Miss Tremount, I would advise you to consult some one older and wiser than yourself before making the attempt."

Nettled at his tone, she replied :

" If it were my desire to recross that stream, I don't think the superior wisdom of Mr. Kingsland would deter me."

" Indeed ! it is well then that your inclinations do not lie in that direction."

" May I ask why ? "

" Because I should take more summary means of preventing the accomplishment of such a desire," he answered, quietly.

" You certainly would not touch me if I should request you not to," returned Maud, indignantly, her blue eyes flashing with anger, and drawing up her figure to its full height.

Looking down on her with an expression of sorrow and anger mingled, he answered, calmly :

" I most assuredly should not hesitate to prevent another such childish display of wilfulness and bravado."

" Really, Mr. Kingsland," said she, crimsoning with anger, " you are trespassing too far on your presumed prerogative of friendship. I deny your right to question my actions in *any* respect, and I do not choose to submit to the dictates of your

judgment or wisdom, however excellent they may be. As my inclinations *do* lead me to return home by the way I had intended, I bid you good-afternoon," and darting a defiant glance at Kingsland, who stood rooted to the spot with amazement at her audacity, she ran swiftly past him, and was just stepping on the weakened plank, when his voice, hoarse with passion, cried, "Stop," and his iron grasp on her arm pulled her back from her perilous position. Standing beside her with his hand holding her arm in its vise-like gripe, his eyes fiery with anger, and his face blanched with suppressed emotion, he at length exclaimed, in a low, vehement tone :

"Maud Tremount, you have twice to-day refused to listen to the advice of one who loved you far too well to see you peril life and limb for the mere sake of defying him ; you have trifled with the love you knew he still felt for you, dared his anger, and ran recklessly into danger—it might have been death. By your utter selfishness and wilfulness you have forfeited his esteem ; his idol is shattered, his diamond has proved paste, and all his bright dreams of the future are dissipated forever. Farewell," he added, bitterly, "may *you* never experience the suffering and disappointment such as your heartlessness has to-day occasioned me."

Turning abruptly from her, he walked off in another direction, and was soon lost among the trees.

Almost stunned with this torrent of reproach, she

stood for a minute watching his retreating figure, and then hurried homeward, her bosom racked with contending emotions, in which despair, wounded vanity, and the thought that she had forfeited the love of the only man she loved, raged uppermost. Rushing upstairs to her own little *boudoir*, she locked the door, and throwing herself on the sofa, burst into a passionate flood of tears. Long and violently she wept, and the painful thought that she merited Kingsland's bitter reproof, did not tend to lessen the anguish of her soul or quiet the tempest of passion raging within her breast.

Hearing Ethel calling her, she hastily bathed her aching brow, and endeavored to wash away the traces of tears on her cheeks; but her eyes were red with weeping, and she dreaded meeting her father's penetrating eye. The housekeeper knocking at the door relieved her fears, however.

"Miss Maud, your father and mother have gone to see Dr. Steadman, who was taken sick after church at noon; and Miss Ethel requests that you will eat supper with her in the library."

Descending to the library, she found a small table, on which was spread their dainty repast, drawn up before Ethel's sofa.

"Maud, I asked Mrs. Farman to bring our tea in here, it is so much more cosy than in the dining-room."

Taking her seat opposite, Maud tried to eat, but every mouthful seemed to choke her. Ethel, no-

ticing her agitation, hastily finished her own tea, and rang the bell to have the table removed. Winding her arm around her sister's waist, she made her lie down on the sofa, and taking the aching head in her lap, said, tenderly :

"Maudie, what's the matter? Won't you tell me, dear?"

"Oh, Ethel, I'm so wretched," cried Maud, sobbing violently ; "and it's all owing to my own fault and wilfulness too."

And then in broken accents she proceeded to give Ethel an account of her afternoon's adventure.

"Well, Maudie, I'm sorry enough that you have had such a desperate quarrel with Mr. Kingsland. He had no right whatever to assert his authority over you in such a peremptory way, and I'm glad you had the spirit to resent it. But," she added, slyly, "didn't I tell you he was not lacking in audacity when occasion demanded it?"

"You may laugh as much as you please, but I like him all the better for the lecture he gave me this afternoon, notwithstanding I resented it so unreasonably. To tell the truth," she said, smiling through her tears, "I tried to cross that rickety little bridge just to test him, but I went too far, and trespassed too much on his forbearance, and now he is lost to me forever. But he never, *never* shall know how much I love him ; I have fallen too far in his estimation ever to make any atonement for the past ; and Ethel, promise me—you

must promise me—never by word, deed, or action to give him any intimation of what I have told you this evening. He can come to the Hall and be received on the same footing as ever by the rest of the family ; for myself, I can find plenty of means of avoiding him without arousing papa's suspicions, or give Mr. Kingsland any pretext whatever to imagine, even, that I entertain one spark of love or friendship for him."

"Maud, by pursuing such a course, you may mar the happiness of two beings for a lifetime."

"Of *one*, you mean," replied her sister, bitterly. "My folly has brought upon me this just retribution. I did not mean to flirt with him ; really, Ethel, I never did," she repeated, as she noticed a smile on Ethel's face. "I always have loved him, and who could help loving such a man ; but then I *did* want my liberty a little while longer, as long as I felt sure of him—but now I have lost all. He doubtless loves some one else, or he never would have spoken to me as he did."

"That does not follow by any means," replied Ethel. "Mr. Kingsland has had plenty of experience with our sex, not to be daunted by this piece of persistent wilfulness of yours, and I don't believe he loves any other woman but you, my dear, notwithstanding your contrariness."

"What did he mean, then, when he said I was false or something else equally complimentary, and that I had fallen in his regard ?"

"He probably would not have uttered such

strong language, had he not been provoked beyond endurance at your obstinacy, which I should think would have tried the patience of a saint. I imagine, too," she added, laughing, "that the chilly condition of his pantaloons did not tend at the time to increase the warmth of his feelings toward you."

"And then he pinched my arm frightfully when he pulled me back from the bridge, which I do not think was any special evidence of his love for me. I actually believe that the flesh is black and blue," and rolling up her sleeve, she discovered three dark bruises on her round, white arm.

"You will certainly have something tender to remember him by for some time to come," said Ethel, laughing at the look of amazement and displeasure on Maud's face, as she perceived the imprint of Kingsland's hand on her arm. "These mighty lords of creation like amazingly to favor us with an exhibition of their power and feats of arms—no pun intended, my dear—occasionally to make us feel our dependence upon them, and if it affords the dear creatures any gratification to indulge in these pleasant little masculine whims, why let them, particularly as we can't help ourselves when these manly moods attack them."

"I am convinced," said Maud, sadly, "that Harold Kingsland is not a man likely to forget very soon my childish and absurd treatment of him this afternoon. He is usually so calm and undemonstrative that I know he must have felt my

unreasonable behavior keenly, otherwise he never would have expressed himself so strongly."

"He is too noble a man to harbor any resentment toward you, though I think he has reason enough to feel deeply hurt at your conduct. But cheer up, Maudie, it will all turn out right in the end, and who knows but I shall stand up as first bridesmaid to somebody next summer. Hark! don't you hear the sleigh-bells?"

"Yes, papa is coming home," exclaimed Maud, rising hastily. "Tell mamma I have a headache and have gone to bed."

CHAPTER XI.

ETHEL'S RUSE.

SEVERAL months passed. Kingsland still visited the Hall, as his absence might have occasioned uncomfortable remark. His bearing toward Maud, though deferential in the extreme, galled her far more than the marked coldness which always accompanied it. She treated him with an indifference and haughtiness of manner which she was far from feeling, for behind that icy exterior there burned a heart overflowing with passionate love for him ; but her proud heart rejected the idea of making any advance toward affecting a reconciliation.

Late one afternoon in the early part of April, the family were startled by the loud ringing of the front-door bell.

" I verily believe that is Tom Clayton ; he always rings loud enough to awaken the Seven Sleepers," exclaimed Ethel, running into the hall, followed by Maud, where they were both clasped in the strong arms of their affectionate cousin.

" Who brought you to the Hall ? " inquired Maud, as soon as she had recovered her breath after this beau-like demonstration, " you surely did not walk

all the way from Millford Depot in this shocking wind?"

"No indeed! I can assure you I had no desire to soil my immaculate boots by a four-mile tramp over these detestable country roads. I met Kingsland at the station, and he brought me up in his dog-cart."

"And did you not ask him to come in, Tom?"

"I declare, Ethel, I was in such a hurry to see you girls, I forgot all about it; but it is not too late now, he is talking to Uncle Ralph on the steps."

"You must have left your politeness in New York, I fancy; but I will go and ask him," said Ethel, going out on the piazza, where she found him conversing with her father.

"Mr. Kingsland, will you not come in and take tea with us? Dr. and Mrs. Steadman are here, and they would like to see you; besides, *I* want you to come."

"Thank you, not to-night. My horse is here, and—"

"Well, Johnson can take him to the stable," interrupted Ethel; "you have not been here for an age, and Tom's visit is so short, so do please change your mind. Maud and I are going to make caramels to-night, and we need more assistance than Tom, with his harum-scarum propensities, can afford. We've been nearly dying of *ennui* for the past two days, it has been so rainy and dismal, so Maud suggested caramels to-night, in which intense

excitement we urgently request you to participate."

Seeing a look in Ethel's face, which seemed to intimate that she wanted him for something else than making caramels, he hesitated no longer, but giving his horse to the groom, followed Ethel and her father into the parlor. Maud, at the first sound of Kingsland's step in the hall, had hurried upstairs to her own room, to change her walking-suit, and to quiet the agitation which his unexpected acceptance of Ethel's invitation had occasioned her.

It was the first time he had made any but formal visits at the Hall since the adventure at the bridge, and she dreaded the meeting which she knew would inevitably arouse Tom Clayton's suspicions. His keen eye and quick penetration were seldom at fault, and she was well aware that he would not be long in comprehending the true state of affairs existing between her and Kingsland. Standing before the pier-glass in her *boudoir* she could not but be conscious of her beauty, though she was far from realizing what an exquisite picture she made; the excitement caused by the anticipated meeting had deepened the rich bloom on her cheeks, and her dark eyes shone like diamonds in their soft brilliancy.

Descending to the drawing-room, she swept into the room with the air of a young queen, and greeted her guests with an ease and grace of manner quite at variance with her feelings. Extending her hand

to Kingsland, who, with one arm resting on the mantel, was regarding her haughtily, she said, with a deep blush :

"I am glad you altered your mind, Mr. Kingsland, and consented to remain to supper. Tom's visits home are generally so transient that we like him to enjoy every minute he is with us, and nothing, I know, could contribute so much to his pleasure as your presence here this evening."

"Ah! I was not before aware of Clayton's ardent affection for me," he replied, coldly; "I felt rather dubious regarding the extent of his regard for me this afternoon, when he rushed into the house to see you young ladies, and left me out in the cold."

"For which breach of politeness you will pardon me, I know," exclaimed Tom, who had just entered the room, and heard the remarks of both parties. "But really, Kingsland, these bewitching cousins of mine are enough to drive all sensible thoughts out of a fellow's head, and I'm not proof against their machinations."

"Indeed, Tom, such astonishing gallantry is worthy of you," said Ethel, making a sweeping curtsey before him. "Positively, I haven't heard a single polite speech from your lips since you arrived; come here, young man, you deserve a lecture, and as Bessie isn't here to deliver it, I'll do it instead."

"One minute, if you please, and I am at your gracious disposal; I have a word to say to our

queenly Maud," and bending his head he whispered in her ear:

"I'm inclined to think, mademoiselle, that you spoke two words for yourself and one for me when you so prettily informed Kingsland of the inestimable pleasure I'd experience in his remaining this evening. There was more meant in what you said than met the ear, my dear. But all is fair in love and war; I suppose Kingsland knows I love him as a cousin," giving her cheek a pinch, "so I'll forgive you for telling such a horrible fib."

"No whispering allowed in company, if you please, young people," said Ethel, taking hold of Tom's arm; "supper is ready, so have the goodness to give me your arm, Tom."

Maud, to her displeasure, was obliged to take the proffered arm of Kingsland, and followed Tom and Ethel into the grand old dining-room where the rest of the family were seated. She could not imagine what possessed her sister, who was generally so obliging as to monopolize the greater part of Kingsland's attentions when he called; now, however, Ethel seemed determined to bring them together, though she very considerately engaged him in conversation at the table. But Maud was greatly relieved when the repast was over, for she could not raise her eyes without meeting those of Kingsland, who sat opposite, bent upon her with a look that embarrassed and disconcerted her.

"I thought we were going to make caramels

this evening," said Tom, who was holding a skein of worsted Maud was attempting to wind.

"Here, Kingsland, won't you hold this tantalizing snarl for Maud? It is continually slipping off my fingers, and it makes me shiver to hold the fuzzy stuff."

"I am sure I cannot imagine what sort of *stuff*, as you call it, your nerves can be made of, and you certainly cannot be commended for possessing much patience," said Maud, as she removed the obnoxious worsted from his hands.

"Well, my dear, I'm not desirous of playing Hercules to your Amphale. However, Kingsland might possible enjoy that rôle, though I fancy your present lamb-like garb is rather more becoming to you than his lion's skin would be."

"Unless you begin to cultivate a little of that Job-like quality of which I was just speaking, *you* will find some difficulty in disentangling the web of your life, which is most decidedly of mingled yarn, good and ill together," returned his cousin, shortly.

"Moralizing! goodness! not very consistent words to fall from *your* rosy lips, sweet coz; do you think so, Kingsland?"

"'Consistency! thou art a jewel,'" quoted Kingsland, with a meaning look at Maud, which Tom observed, and instantly took advantage of.

"Don't you wish she were one?" he said, with a quizzical glance at his cousin; "then you could have her put into a locket or ring, and wear her

around your neck or near your heart, whichever would be most convenient."

Maud was furious. Rising angrily, she abruptly walked into the hall followed by Tom, who threw his arm around her, saying, in his most supplicating tones :

"Now, Maudie, blaze away with all your might. I deserve to be consigned to Hades or any other equally pleasant place your highness chooses to send me. The pretty speech dropped from my lips without a moment's thought. Forgive your old cousin, won't you ?"

"How *could* you speak so before Mr. Kingsland, Tom ? You ought at least to have had sufficient consideration for my feelings not to have talked so outrageously," said Maud, her eyes aglow with anger and vexation.

"He'll forget all about it in two minutes," he replied, with commendable assurance ; "so let us go to the kitchen. Where is Ethel ?"

"She has gone to see if Jenny has everything ready for your frolic," answered Mrs. Tremount, who had entered the hall accompanied by Kingsland. "Maud, dear, you had better change your dress, or pin it up before beginning operations."

"Won't you give me some pins, Tom, to fasten it up ?" she asked, swallowing her resentment.

"Do you take me for a pin-cushion ?"

"As far as softness is concerned, I think you would make a very good one."

"Thanks ; a very charitable remark. Allow me

to observe that I think you are in a decidedly belligerent mood to-night, so I'll leave you for Kingsland to manage. He is much better posted in the art of training *deer* than I am. I'll away to the kitchen."

"You shall not stir one step until you have helped me fasten up my train," she said imperiously, catching his arm.

"I haven't any more idea how to pin up that long trailing thing than a—a—"

"Monkey," suggested Maud.

"Well, yes, if you choose to acknowledge the relationship of that interesting animal, which I suppose you ought to, considering you and I are descended from that handsome and intelligent race. Kingsland is probably well-provided with pins from some little heart-shaped cushion you have doubtless given him, and *I* have not one to my name."

Slipping his arm from her grasp, he made an expeditious exit from the hall, leaving Maud and Kingsland alone.

Annoyed and embarrassed, she turned a half-deprecating look toward him; stepping forward, with an amused smile on his face, he quietly took from his vest-pocket a little well-worn pin-cushion which she instantly recognized as one she had given him months before, and stooping down, gallantly pinned up her long train. The ridiculous predicament which Tom had left her in, struck her so ludicrously, that she felt inclined to laugh as she

looked over her shoulder and watched him. Neither spoke during the operation, and once, as she handed him a pin, their eyes met; hers were brimful with suppressed laughter, which his instantly reflected, and a brilliant smile dispelled the haughty expression which had become almost habitual on his handsome face, as he heard her low, musical laugh.

"Maud, are you never coming?" cried Ethel from the kitchen.

Hastily crossing the large square hall, she opened a door into a long corridor, through which she passed to the kitchen, followed closely by Kingsland.

CHAPTER XII.

"SOME CUPID KILLS WITH ARROWS, SOME WITH TRAPS."

THIS was a representative kitchen of *auld lang syne*. Forty years ago, our mothers and grandmothers rejoiced in such bright, cheery apartments; the floor was as white as oak could be made by frequent applications of soap and sand, and a certain kind of elbow exercise (!) now almost unknown, since machinery has usurped the place of labor. The rows of glistening pans arranged on two sides, with the polished dishes filling a dresser on the third, evinced the careful attention of the mistress of that domain, while the old-fashioned settle near the huge fireplace gave added comfort to the room. A large, open fire blazed upon the irons, with its back log, and fore stick, and piled-up addition of smaller wood; the crane, with its hooks and trammels, swung in easy contentment in the leisure evening hours, only bearing a large brass kettle filled with hot water, which old Jenny kept in readiness for emergencies. No boiler, nor grate, nor steam disfigured the quaint old fireplace; in each corner was placed a block, about which modern curiosity will require some explanation, but

which were in constant use in our grandmothers' days. These blocks were about a foot high, and cut from old oak-trees; on the top were small holes where the youngsters cracked their walnuts, as hickory-nuts were then called. They served also as comfortable seats in the corner during the cold winter evenings, and were always in demand.

Three windows gave an air of cheerfulness to the room, in which there appeared no evidence of labor and its concomitants of dirt and disorder. When Mr. Tremount came into possession of the old Hall at his father's death, the many endearing reminiscences of his boyhood, in which the grand old kitchen with its antique fireplace had its full share, clung to him with a fondness, which his college life and years of travel had never weakened. In it, he had enjoyed many a boyish frolic and played many a naughty trick on good-natured old Jenny, who had reigned there supreme for over forty years. She never minded what "Massa Ralph" did, notwithstanding she was the principle subject of his teasing and mischievous pranks. When he married at an early age, and took possession of the Hall, he resolved that the dear old kitchen never should be altered, but had the rear apartment, or large back kitchen, fitted up to suit the modern idea of his young city wife. The great, dark range, with its ovens on top, and all the modern appliances of steam and machinery, were here employed to lessen labor, so that the old kitchen, with its bright

rag carpet, was used now as a comfortable kitchen parlor.

It was in this rear apartment that Maud and Kingsland found Tom and Ethel seated before a shining white table, scraping chocolate. The latter, with her sleeves rolled up, was enveloped in an enormous cooking-apron which reached from her neck to the floor, while Tom was radiant in the borrowed uniform of the butler, looking like a veritable French cook, as Ethel informed him.

"Well, lady fair, so you *did* condescend to make the best of circumstances, and allow Kingsland to pin you up, I declare," he said, walking around her and surveying admiringly the neatly secured train, displaying beneath the pretty tucked petticoat with its dainty frills, and the shapely little foot peeping out.

"Take a seat, won't you, and help us scrape this chocolate? See what an enormous quantity I prepared, Kingsland."

"Indeed, Mr. Kingsland, he scraped but one little bit of a square," interposed Ethel, "and when he heard you coming, he very politely emptied the contents of my plate into his, and smeared his hands all over with the sticky mixture, to make you think he had been wonderfully industrious in helping me, whereas he has not been doing a thing but get in my way ever since he came in."

"Ethel, I was not aware that you were addicted to fibbing," returned Tom, pinching her cheek

with his sticky fingers, and smearing it with chocolate.

"Tom, I do wish you would behave yourself. If you act so outrageously again I shall dismiss you," replied Ethel, wiping it from her face.

"Maud, there are two aprons on the window-sill for you and Mr. Kingsland; please tie his on for him; my hands are covered with chocolate, and Tom would certainly choke him if he made the attempt."

"Why so, young woman?" demanded her cousin.

"I judge from personal experience, which is a sad teacher sometimes, for I have not quite recovered from the strangling operation yet."

"And Maud, you had better stand on this chair to tie it on," said Tom, pushing one towards her; "Kingsland is such a giant, you'd never be able to stretch your dear little arms as high as his neck;—in fact," he added, with a wicked smile, "I don't believe you come up any higher than his heart."

"Mr. Kingsland is not more than an inch taller than you, sir, with your poker-like proportions," answered Maud, with some irritation; "so perhaps it would be quite as well for you to perform the duties of a valet, as for me."

"Many thanks for the suggestion," said Kingsland, laughing, "but really I have no great partiality for such sticky fingers as Clayton's to wait upon me; so as long as the mountain won't go to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain," and taking a chair, he waited until Maud's deft fingers

had tied the long, white apron around his neck, when he performed the same services for her, to which she submitted quite meekly and graciously, considering the saucy glances with which her cousin favored her.

"Well, I'm glad you are ready at last," exclaimed Ethel, as Maud stood up. "Won't you measure out some syrup, cream, and sugar, while I wash my hands? and Mr. Kingsland, please lift that pot on the range for me. But dear me, who will butter the pans? I told Jenny we would do everything ourselves, and I hate to get my fingers all covered with butter."

"Let Tom do that," replied Maud, putting the ingredients of the caramels into the pot, and stirring them briskly; "if his fingers are as soft as his heart, he'll succeed admirably."

"I can't imagine why you should complain of my mellowness of heart toward *you*, my spunky cousin."

"Perhaps I made a mistake; I should have said, doubtless with much more truth, that if the ends of your fingers contained as much acid as flows from your tongue, our caramels would prove a sorry mixture indeed, and anything but a palatable dose to take. But then, Tom," she added with a winning smile, "notwithstanding the pugilistic character of your attentions towards your spunky cousin, I fancy there is some little nook in your heart devoted to my special use, for Bessie's sake: is there not?"

"You may be sure of that, and for your own sake too," responded Tom, heartily. "There is a very large space in this manly bosom partitioned off for your particular accommodation, though for some mysterious reason we always manage to fight most of the time we are together. Kingsland,

> "'I know a thing that's most uncommon;
> (Envy, be silent and attend)'

—"that's Loo Preston,—

> "'I know a reasonable woman,
> Handsome and witty, yet a friend.'

"That's Maud, ladies and gentlemen, though I think the 'reasonable' part of the quotation might with great propriety be left out, and *spunky*, or *wilful*, or some other equally pretty adjective, substituted instead."

"You talk more than all the rest of us together, Tom," said Ethel. "There is Mr. Kingsland looking at that mixture Maud is stirring so energetically, as if the very light of his eyes would hasten it's boiling; and I have charitably undertaken your task, and buttered all these pans, while you haven't done a solitary thing but keep that unruly member of yours wagging ever since you made your appearance."

"And pray who scraped that chocolate for you, and pinned your apron on, and blistered his fingers with that confounded range cover, and—"

"Oh, your attentions have been *so* numerous, dear, that I scarcely remember what they were. I think

that you need just now a little something to sweeten your disposition," and slipping quickly behind him, she passed a spoon covered with molasses over his mustache, and then sprang out of his reach toward the kitchen door.

"Really, Ethel, this is too much," exclaimed Tom, indignantly, while he hastily washed off the fringy covering of his upper lip. "I'll teach you, young lady, that you can't play such tricks on me with impunity."

And striding toward the door, he rushed after Ethel, who ran down the cellar stairs, and Maud and Kingsland were left alone.

Her first impulse was to follow them, but Kingsland, as if anticipating such a proceeding had cut off all means of retreat by quietly placing himself between her and the door. She commenced to stir the caramels with desperate energy, and in a moment the whole seething, bubbling mass had risen to the top of the kettle, and was boiling over.

"Oh, Mr. Kingsland, for mercy's sake come and help me; I can't lift this kettle, it's so heavy," she said.

Kingsland stepped forward to assist her, and as he was lifting the boiling candy to a cooler place on the range, Maud seized the opportunity, bent only on escaping from Kingsland's watchful eye, and without once thinking how childish and undignified her conduct might appear, she hastened to the kitchen door, which, to her utter dismay, she found locked.

Angry and mortified, she turned toward him, and in her haughtiest tones exclaimed:

"Mr. Kingsland, you will oblige me by opening that door immediately. I am amazed at your presumption, sir, in locking it."

Unmindful of her anger, he quietly walked forward, and throwing his arm around her, said firmly:

"Maud, listen to me. So you thought to defy me again! You must, you *shall* listen to me," he added passionately, as she struggled to escape, and drawing her to the old settle he bent his head, and said, in earnest, thrilling tones:

"You are mine now, and no power on earth shall again separate us. I know that you love me, notwithstanding your icy tones and looks. If you only knew the bitter, bitter anguish you have caused me for the past few months, you would not turn away your face from me. Look at me, darling, and tell me that you can love me just a little."

"Oh, let me go! let me go!" she cried, implor-ingly.

"Never, never!" he exclaimed, drawing her close to him. "Maud, you must tell me if you love me; look up, darling."

But she only hid her face on his shoulder, though he could see the burning blush that over-spread her neck and cheek at his words.

"Maud, look at me," he repeated, and taking her hands in his, he raised her crimson face. Lifting

her eyes, she met his, burning with the unyielding, all-absorbing love he had felt so long for her, and hiding her face in his arm, her frame trembling with agitation, she murmured, in faltering tones:

"O! Mr. Kingsland, I am not worthy of your love; I am so wilful, so irritable, so—"

"Hush, no more self-upbraidings, my child; I have known you long enough not to be afraid of your temper and independence. I knew those eyes could not deceive me, and you are mine, my darling, my wife. But, O! Maudie, I am not satisfied yet; I want to hear from your own sweet lips that you love me. Look straight into my eyes, dearest, and tell me that you do."

"I cannot; oh! don't ask me," she cried, in distress, as she tried to raise her quivering eyelids. "You know it without my telling you."

"No, I don't," he answered, wilfully, though the happy smile on his face belied his words. "I must hear those precious words from your own dear lips."

Lifting her head slowly from it's hiding-place, while the scarlet blushes mantled cheek and brow, her beautiful eyes beaming with tears, she whispered, in a scarcely audible voice:

"I do love you," and overcome with confusion, she struggled to release herself; but tightening his arm around her, he made her sit down by the fire beside him. Then, in whispered words of love and tenderness, he endeavored to quiet the storm of emotion which the arrival of his love, and the

irresistible manner in which he had claimed her, had caused to rage within her breast. The pent-up feelings of the past few months had burst forth, and she leaned on his shoulder, half-faint from exhaustion and excitement.

The sound of approaching footsteps, and Ethel's laugh echoing through the halls, disturbed their *tête à tête*.

"Mr. Kingsland, do let me go! there come Tom and Ethel; oh! *please* let me go," she cried, in alarm.

"Well, would it be anything so very terrible if they should see us?" he asked, quite enjoying her distress. "I rather fancy they will see us in this lover-like attitude very frequently in future, so they may as well get accustomed to it."

"Oh, but not to-night! Please, Mr. Kingsland."

"Then drop the 'Mr. Kingsland,' and give me a kiss of your own sweet will, and I will release you."

"I cannot; you are too tall," she replied, demurely.

"That is easily remedied on bended knee, fair lady," and kneeling gracefully before her, he clasped her hand to his heart, while she, bending slightly, imprinted a soft little kiss on his forehead, then eluding his grasp, sprang quickly into the back kitchen.

"That was as soft as thistle-down, Maud. I shall require a repetition of it before long."

He then walked toward the kitchen door, and softly turned the lock, just in time to admit Tom and Ethel, the latter with her apron full of rosy-cheeked apples, and the former carrying an enormous pitcher brimming over with cider.

"Oh, Maud, we *did* have such a time in the cellar," exclaimed Ethel, breathless from her exertions. "Tom flew after me in such hot haste that I was forced to take refuge in the coal-bin, which he dared not enter for fear of injuring his dainty broadcloth."

"Yes, and she would not leave her dark domain, until I had promised by all the ghosts of the cellar not to touch her. After all, she was obliged to accept my assistance in getting out of the coal-bin. I found a pitcher, which might have served Goliath for his toilet stand, in suspicious proximity to the cider cask, which I tapped, and the sparkling amber liquid gushed out deliciously."

"He may well call it 'delicious,' judging from the way he imbibed it," said Ethel. "If the pitcher was Goliath-like in its ample propensities, his capacity for disposing of the cider was equally gigantic. But how have you and Mr. Kingsland been progressing with the caramels? I suppose they are nearly done by this time."

"By Jove, Ethel, they've let the fire go down, and the caramels are as hard as a rock in the kettle," said Tom, examining the neglected candy.

One glance at Maud's scarlet cheeks convinced Ethel that the caramels had been but a minor ob-

ject of consideration during her visit to the cellar; and hastening to cover her sister's embarrassment, she replied:

"Never mind, Tom, just get some more sticks of wood and put them on the fire, while I mix some more cream and sugar into this interesting mass. It will taste just as well as the other, and I don't believe any one will know the difference, unless you, with your usual discrimination, speak of it."

But that quick-witted young gentleman had noticed Maud's changing color, and guessed intuitively the condition of affairs. Leaving Ethel and Kingsland to take care of the caramels, he drew Maud one side, and whispered in her ear:

"You need not blush so furiously, sweet coz. 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' as I informed Kingsland, and he has evidently acted upon my happy suggestion, judging from your illuminated countenance. 'All's well that ends well,' notwithstanding the caramels have gone the way of all things, and I congratulate you from my heart on your conquest, or rather his, for I fancy he found you pretty hard game to catch."

"You're on your stilts again, Tom, and you may as well get off them and spare your decidedly trite quotations, for I have not the faintest idea what you mean."

"Who is telling fibs now, I'd like to know? Come, Maudie, you needn't try that with me; I have been through the mill myself, to a slight ex-

tent, with some charming little lambs of sixteen and seventeen, and I understand their pretty blushes and shy, bewitching ways too well not to know that this 'much ado about nothing,' which you and Kingsland have been keeping up the past year for our edification, is over at last. Peace has been declared, and the belligerent parties are soon to be united in matrimony. Really, Maud, you color so charmingly, that it is a perfect luxury to tease you, you look so confoundedly pretty. I shall have to give Kingsland my receipt for making you blush."

"Take a chair and rest a minute, won't you? I am sure you must be quite exhausted," said Maud dryly, as Tom paused to recover his breath.

"Not at all, dear; I'm still equal to another effort," and catching her in his arms, he danced her across the kitchen floor, and finally deposited her panting and breathless on a table at the farther extremity of the room.

While Tom was amusing himself teasing Maud, Kingsland assisted Ethel to rectify the neglected caramels, by mixing in more of the ingredients.

"Ethel—I beg your pardon—Miss Ethel," said he, "you must forgive me for neglecting your candy, but we were otherwise engaged while you and Clayton were in the cellar."

"So I imagined, as soon as I had glanced at Maud's tell-tale face," she replied, smiling. "But really, Mr. Kingsland, you may as well call me Ethel in future, for I am only too glad that the

event has happened which gives you the right to to call me so. You and Maud have been playing at cross-purposes long enough, and she loved you all the time (although her pride resented the idea of your knowing it), and I am thankful that the war is ended between you. She is my pet sister, and you must take good care of her. If I do lose a sister, I gain what I never had—a brother; and there is no one I had rather call by that name than yourself."

"Thank you a thousand times," answered Kingsland, pressing her hand warmly. "You may be sure that Maud shall never lack anything which a true, loving heart and strong arm can contribute to her comfort and happiness."

"Kingsland," said Tom, dragging Maud up to the table where Ethel was checking off caramels, "what in the name of all the gods of Greece and heathendom have you been saying to this superb cousin of mine to make her eyes scintillate so astonishingly? Take my advice, and don't let her have her own way too much; those eyes of hers would overcome the stoutest heart. She's a glorious girl, though a trifle tempestuous at times, and difficult to manage. Ah yes!" he added, with a melodramatic air,

> "'''Tis too much prov'd that with devotion's visage
> And pious actions, they [I mean her eyes] would
> Sugar o'er the devil himself.'"

"Mercy, Tom, you have a most unhappy faculty

for misquoting poetry and dabbling in silly rhyme," said Ethel, laughing. "Mr. Kingsland, you had better send him a challenge for using such profane language. Come here, Tom; you shall have to do penance for your misdemeanors; just take those caramels and the cider into the dining-room, and then come back for the apples, while I run into the laundry and wash my hands."

"Any more commands, madam!"

"Yes, go and ask Maud's forgiveness for your wicked nonsense, and then do as I have told you."

Tom had noticed the pained expression on Maud's face when he spoke, and he felt half sorry that he had repeated the quotation, so going up to her, he said, kindly:

"Maudie dear, you did not really think that I meant what I said, did you?"

"No indeed, Tom; of course I know you did not mean anything unkind," she replied, with a faint smile, though her lip quivered.

"And I have your forgiveness?"

"Certainly, you have, if there is anything to forgive."

"Thank you. Now my spirits and happiness are restored; they were quite on the wane a few minutes since," and taking up the caramels and cider, he marched into the dining-room, followed by Ethel, who carried a plate of apples.

As soon as they had left the room, Maud sat down on the bench by the fire, and burst into tears.

"Why, darling, what is the matter," said Kingsland, throwing his arm around her.

"Oh, Mr. Kingsland, you heard what Tom said," cried Maud, in a proud, passionate voice.

"Yes, little one, and what of it?"

"I am so cross and quick-tempered, you will never be able to get along with me. If I were only sweet and gentle like Ethel, then—"

"You would not be my own queenly Maud," interrupted Kingsland, softly. "No, my darling, I know all your faults, and am not afraid of undertaking the charge of your ladyship at all; so cheer up, and don't look so grieved." And lifting her tear-stained face, he kissed her tenderly, saying, with a grave, sweet smile:

"To me you are just as sweet and lovely as you are beautiful, and though we may not always agree, yet we won't quarrel; so never doubt my love, my child, though you may be naughty sometimes."

Maud looked up, with a bright smile, to his kind, loving face, and with a sudden impulse, threw her arms around his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder. Tom's quick step in the hall awoke them from the happy dreams in which both were indulging, and rising quickly, they followed him to the dining-room, where the whole party was merrily engaged disposing of their impromptu feast. Nuts, cake, and raisins were added by Tom's special request, for that young gentleman possessed a hearty appreciation of the good things of this

life, and was gifted with an ample capacity to enjoy them.

Kingsland drove Dr. and Mrs. Steadman home in his own carriage, and after their departure, Tom performed sundry gymnastic feats and gentlemanly capers for the edification of his cousins, and having teased Maud till she was nearly distracted, was finally sent off to bed, and the sisters retired to their own apartment.

Shutting the door, Ethel threw her arms around Maud's neck, and kissing her fondly said,

"Maudie, you can't tell how delighted I am that you and Mr. Kingsland are at last reconciled; but did not my little ruse succeed admirably?"

"Your little ruse," replied Maud, in surprise.

"Promise me faithfully that you won't be vexed, and I will tell you."

"I am too happy to be vexed at anything now, even at Tom's abominable teasing, so begin your confession."

"Well, then, last Thursday while we were out driving in the pony carriage, you recollect we stopped at Mrs. Ryan's, and you got out to leave some jelly for that little sick boy of hers. While you were in the house, Mr. Kingsland rode up on horseback, and dismounting, came up to the phaeton to speak to me. I told him I had written Tom to come up and spend Sunday with us without your knowledge, and invited him to pass Saturday evening with us at the Hall. You see, my dear, I was determined to bring you together at all hazards,

and thought that Tom would make a very respectable decoy-duck for the purpose. He partially accepted my invitation, and I had just time to give him Tom's letter to post, when you came out. As soon as you spied your quondam lover, you enveloped yourself in a mantle of ice, and looked the very perfection of a faultily faultless Maud! When he offered his hand to assist you into the phaeton, you accepted it with just about as much freezing indifference, as an animated icicle might have displayed; and bowing haughtily, you whipped up the ponies, and away we flew. But I turned around and gave him an encouraging little nod, which he evidently understood, for he smiled significantly, and galloped off in grand style. But I imagine Saladin felt the touch of his spurs more than once, for if his rider felt half as hurt and indignant as I was provoked at you, he would have vented his anger on something, even if his pet horse had to bear the brunt of it. But you see he was determined to have you, no matter what happened; and he succeeded much beyond my expectations, I must acknowledge. Did I not tell you, long ago, that there was no want of audacity in that conquering will of his? And now, Maudie, are you angry at me for my sisterly intention?"

"You certainly possess the faculty of making yourself understood in the plainest terms possible," replied Maud smiling, while two big teardrops sparkled in her eyes as she thought how much pain and sorrow she had caused Kingsland

by her coldness and studied indifference. "I shall never regret your interference, Ethel, though you do not mince matters much when you express your disapprobation of my numerous delinquincies."

"Does mamma know of your engagement?"

"Of course she does. I told her just before we came upstairs, while you and Tom were waltzing in the hall, and she and papa both seem very much pleased at my choice."

"At *his*, you mean," replied Ethel, saucily. "For really, Maud, that man would have you in spite of yourself; he would have waded through fire and water before he'd have given you up."

"Don't you hear somebody in the hall?" said Maud, beginning hastily to undress. "Do hurry, Ethel, I believe it is papa coming to lecture us about sitting up so late."

The door opened, and Mrs. Tremount entered the room.

"Why, girls, arn't you in bed yet?" she exclaimed, in surprise. "It is half-past one, and you must get in directly."

"We're going to hop right in," said Ethel, suiting the action to the word, and springing into bed.

"Do wait until I have braided my hair, and tuck us in just as you used to do when we were children," said Maud, brushing out her long, wavy locks.

"Yes, dear, but you must hurry."

The sisters were soon snugly tucked in, and Mrs. Tremount, bending over them with a soft, sweet smile on her lovely face, said fondly:

"I wish our Bessie's head lay between yours, my darlings, and then I would have my trio of graces to kiss for good-night."

"Mamma dear, Ethel and I have been talking secrets to-night," said Maud, winding her arm around her mother's neck.

"It is not very difficult for me to guess what they were, my child. Your father and I are very happy that you have secured the love of Mr. Kingsland. He is a noble man, Maudie, and well worthy of your warmest love and respect. But you must shut your eyes now, and go to sleep; you have had enough excitement already to-night, so don't talk any more, dearie."

Bending over them, she kissed each one tenderly, and bade them good-night.

CHAPTER XIII.

OBJECTIONS OVERRULED.

THE weeks flew by on rapid wings, and very happy ones they were to Maud and her lover. The thorough love and confidence she reposed in him, and the very intensity of happiness which the consciousness of his devotion caused her to experience, made her unusually quiet; she felt too happy to be gay. Indeed, this complete submission of his spirited cousin to the "stern decrees of fate," as Tom called it, was the favorite subject of that young gentleman when he indulged his insatiable propensity to tease; but she received his sarcastic speeches with so much good-humor, and parried his sallies with so much dexterity, that he finally desisted from his tormenting amusement, and declared enthusiastically that she was a *regular brick*, in which dignified opinion Kingsland heartily coincided.

May, with her genial showers and warm sunshine, had brightened the whole aspect of Nature; the brown hills and fields of winter had emerged from their snowy depths, and were now clothed with the fresh, young grass of early spring. The

robins and bluebirds hopped merrily about the broad, sweeping lawns and picturesque knolls of Tremount Hall, filling the fragrant air with their notes of gladness. The tiny white anemones and wild purple violets of the woods added their soft fascinations to beautify and enliven the bright world around; and tree and rivulet, birds and flowers, made all Nature vocal with their loving praise to Him "who maketh the outgoings of the morning to rejoice."

"Maud," said Mr. Tremount one morning at breakfast, "I wish you would ride to the farm and tell Miller to come to the Hall to-night; I want to see him on business."

"If mamma and Ethel would like to go, we can take the phaeton, and come home by Millford."

"You won't be able to take the phaeton to-day; the ponies need shoeing, and I am going to take the carriage horses to the Fort this morning, so you had better ride Selim; he needs exercise, and would enjoy a canter over the hills quite as much as you. Ethel can ride my roan if she likes, and accompany you."

"No, I thank you, papa, I have no desire to have my neck broken at present. I never could manage that fractious animal of yours. He knows very well I'm afraid of him, and takes advantage of my fear by dancing across the road, and capering about so abominably, that he makes me actually dizzy as he waltzes along. The last time I

rode him, I was completely tired out when I reached home."

"Well, I will ride him then, and you can take Selim if you like; but you will find, I fancy, that you have only exchanged *Scylla* for *Charybdis*, for Selim is quite as spirited as Beppo when he hasn't been exercised for a few days."

"But he is smaller and more manageable, so I will ride him with some pleasure."

"What are you going down to the lake for, Ralph?" asked Mrs. Tremount.

"I am going to have my yacht painted and repaired. Next month, when Bessie comes home from school, I propose forming a fishing party, and spending a day on Lake George."

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Ethel, clapping her hands. "But, papa, we must have somebody else besides our own family. Harold is about as good as no one at all when Maud is around" (bowing profoundly to her sister), "and Bess and I *must* have some sort of beau to play the devoted, even if we can only have one between us."

"And so you shall, you forlorn little maiden," responded her father, laughing; "you can write Tom to invite Ashton, and Graham, and Temple, and any one else you please. But I must be off. Kingsland is going with me, so I shall have to stop at Hazelhurst on my way."

"Did you say Harold was going with you?" inquired Maud.

"Yes, dear; have you any message to send him?"

"No sir, I believe not."

"Why Maud, how inhuman you are. All lovers are silly as far as my limited experience goes, so you may as well sustain the general reputation, and send him that rose in your hair. Here, papa, give Harold this little rose-bud with Maud's dearest love; you needn't tell him, however, that the happy thought originated with me, for he might not prize it as much."

"Well, good-by, all of you. I shall bring Harold home with me to supper; so, Maud, look your prettiest."

"Ethel, how absurd you are," said Maud, after her father had driven off. "Harold will think me a sentimental little goose for sending him that rose."

"Well, he won't be very far wrong if he does; only instead of a goose, he'll probably declare you to be his own duckie darling, lovey dovey, or something else equally *fowl* and loverlike."

"I think you have been sufficiently facetious this morning to last for some time to come, so please tell Johnson to order the horses, while I run out to the green-house; I have some directions to give Adam about the hanging baskets."

The gentlemen returned about seven o'clock, and while sitting at the tea-table, Maud noticed the unusual silence of Kingsland, and said, anxiously:

"What makes you so quiet, Harold? have you received any bad news to-day?"

"No, darling, not bad news exactly."

"What is it then?"

"As your father and I were driving up to the house, my coachman rode up on horseback and handed me a note from Ashton which annoyed me somewhat."

"What does he say?"

"He writes that the senior partner of the Liverpool branch of our firm has sent him word that a fraud had been committed by some one of the employés, and requesting the immediate presence of one of our New York house to investigate matters. Thirty thousand dollars have disappeared most mysteriously; the detectives have been at work hunting up the criminal parties, but as yet their search has been fruitless."

"What do you expect to do about it?"

"Ashton writes that his father is very ill and he cannot leave him at present. Steele was married last Thursday, and started on Saturday for a trip across the Continent, and will not be home for six weeks or two months, consequently it devolves upon me, I suppose, as the only leisure member of the firm, to go to Liverpool, and attend to the business myself."

"How provoking," said Ethel, as she noticed Maud's anxious face. "Well, Harold, if you should have to go, when would you sail?"

"I could not possibly get off before the middle of June; the repairs and improvements I am making on my house for this little girl"—patting

Maud's hand, which rested on the table—"and the new drive I am having opened on the west side of the lawn, will require my presence here a week longer at least, and I shall have to make business visits to Boston and Philadelphia before I sail. So I think I can hardly get off before the middle of next month."

"And how long would you remain?"

"Three months probably. Maud," he whispered as they were rising from the table, "come out on the piazza for a few minutes, I have something to say to you."

Wrapping a soft crimson shawl around her shoulders, he led her out on the piazza, and drawing her arm within his, said, in a low tone:

"Maud, when I go abroad, I want to take my wife with me."

"Your wife! what do you mean?" she replied, in a startled voice.

"Don't be frightened, dearie, I mean that I want to be married before I go, and take you with me."

"Oh, Harold, not so soon," she said, looking up to his face imploringly.

"And why not now as any other time."

"Oh, because—because I never thought of it, and it seems so soon."

"Did you not expect to marry me some time when we became engaged?" he asked, with an ominous ring of determination in his voice, which she dreaded to hear.

"I did not think of getting married for ever so

long," she answered, forlornly. "We're so happy now; why cannot we remain so?"

"Because I am not happy enough yet," he replied, drawing her closer to him and kissing her flushed cheek.

"Do not ask me; it is entirely too soon, and I do not wish to."

"A very paltry reason to give, if you don't. We expected to be married in September, and what difference will three short months make with you? It would be infinitely pleasanter, I think, for us to spend the summer travelling together, instead of your remaining this side of the ocean, while I am wandering disconsolate and alone on the other."

"But you could not attend to business if I were with you."

"Why not?"

"Because I should not want you to."

"Now Maud, do be reasonable. You know I would have to see to those annoying business affairs at Liverpool, for that is why I go out; but I would dispose of them as speedily as possible, and then we would take a trip across the Channel, spend a few months in Italy and Switzerland, and perhaps prolong our travels until spring, if it would suit your pleasure, dearest."

The prospect was very pleasant, but she had no notion of being disposed of in so summary a manner. After a few minutes' silence, she raised her eyes, flashing with the old unsubmissive spirit, and said, decidedly:

"No, Harold, it is so soon, and you are cruel to urge me. It will only be three or four weeks before you sail, my *trousseau* is not ready, and my bridesmaids have not been notified, nor the cards printed, besides, as I told you before, I don't wish to be married just yet, and I am not going to be, either."

"So you do not care to resign your maiden meditations into my cruel keeping for the present?" he said, sarcastically.

"No; and what is more, I do not intend to," she replied coldly, striving to withdraw her arm from his.

But tightening his hold on her arm, he drew her to a retired recess on the broad piazza, and made her sit down on the rustic bench near by.

"Maud!" said he, sternly, "two months ago you promised to be my wife; you told me then that you loved me, and I believe you do still; my love for you has increased ten-fold since then, if that were possible, and I hold you to your promise. The words you uttered then are irrevocable, and four weeks from this time I shall claim you as my wife."

Too much surprised to say anything, she looked at him for an instant in utter amazement; then springing up, she threw aside his detaining hand, and exclaimed, defiantly:

"If I choose to break my promise, you certainly will be kind enough to release me from my engagement!"

"Never!" he replied, hoarsely.

"Mr. Kingsland, I shall not allow your arrogant, overbearing manner to intimidate me," she retorted angrily, while the crimson deepened on her cheek.

"Maud, do you know what you are saying?" said Kingsland, his face darkening with anger.

"I am perfectly aware of what I am saying, and whom I am addressing."

"Take care, then, and don't try me too far; you tried it once before, and probably remember the result."

"You surely would not care to marry a woman whose engagement to you now is an irksome bondage," she replied, recklessly.

"Maud, are you speaking the truth?" he asked, in low, passionate tones, while his face turned ghastly white.

"Yes," she said, her own paling beneath his burning gaze.

"Don't you love me?"

"No," she whispered.

"Maud, you *dare* not tell me so again. Look at me—I demand it."

Raising her eyes, she met his, so full of sorrow and terrible disappointment, that her own drooped beneath them, and throwing herself on the bench, she yielded herself to a perfect abandonment of grief, and wept without restraint.

Kingsland watched her for a few minutes silently, then raising her trembling form, he took her in his arms, saying, sadly:

"Maudie, do you not know that I love you far

too well to urge you to any measure which would not conduce to your happiness? Forgive me, darling, if I have been harsh; but if you only realized one quarter of the love I feel for you, and how I long for your dear presence to brighten my lonely life, you would not deny me the treasure I ask you for. Since my mother died, think how many solitary days I have passed at Hazelhurst, with only my weekly visits to town to vary the monotony of my life? The great rooms of the old house, and the intense quiet and solitariness which reign there, seem almost insupportable to me sometimes, after I return from my calls here, where everything is so bright, and cheerful, and full of life; my old housekeeper is a dear old body, but she is deaf and feeble, and consequently not very enlivening company for me at any time. Darling, I need you, and I *must* have you. Won't you let me call you my wife, before I go away?"

After a painful effort to control herself, Maud looked up to the loving face above her, and said, with quivering lips:

"Harold, forgive me. I did not really mean to be so unkind and unreasonable. How will you *ever* get along with such an untractable wife?"

"Well, you are rather refractory, that's a fact, but don't trouble your little head about that," he replied, smiling and kissing her fondly.

"And you do forgive me?"

"Yes, little girl; can you doubt it?"

"No indeed, but I am desperately afraid you

will find that I belong to the Xantippe style of wife."

"And what if I do?"

"Oh, you will probably manage me as you did just now, but after all I do not think I shall be very quarrelsome; *she* had such a frightfully homely man for her husband, that I don't wonder she felt cross and unamiable occasionally, just to be quits with his face."

"You're a very naughty child to speak so irreverently of old Socrates. He did not make his own face, so you must not blame him for his unfortunate looks."

"Well, I'm thankful that you are rather passable-looking than otherwise."

"Indeed, and what do you call passable?"

"You're fishing, sir, and I shall not tell you."

"Do, Maud; you never yet have told me what you thought of me; say, does my face suit you?"

"You are very conceited. Of course it does, and you know very well that I would not have you, if you had not just the handsomest face in the world, and the kindest, warmest heart," she answered, hiding her face in her hands.

"Oh, you pretty flatterer," he said, laughing, as he pulled her hands away; "but do you know I shall not believe all that delightful nonsense, unless you tell me that you have relented, and still love me a little?"

"Ain't you satisfied yet, you insatiable man, with what I have already told you?" she answered,

flashing a brilliant smile at him, though the tears were still sparkling in her eyes.

"You have not told me anything yet," he replied, with an amused little laugh, as he looked down on her glowing face.

"Why, I have told you everything I am going to tell you but this—bend your head a little; I can't whisper so high up."

Stooping his head till it touched hers, he strained his ear to catch the words she murmured:

"I love you with my whole heart, and I'll—I'll do as you wish."

"God bless you, darling," he exclaimed, in a transport of joy, as he caught her in his arms, "I knew my true, noble Maud would not disappoint me again. But it is getting too cold out here for you; besides, we must go in and tell Ethel and your mother of our happy plans for June."

Had Maud noticed the triumphant smile on Kingsland's face, she would probably have been disposed to rebel against his authority somewhat longer, and have yielded her wishes to his with less grace and submission than she did.

The remainder of the evening was passed in talking over the grand event which was to take place on the 15th of June. Mrs. Tremount, after some reluctance, had been finally overruled by Kingsland's importunities and auguments, and had given her consent to the rather hasty marriage.

The following week Maud and her mother passed in New York, purchasing "fussy gewgaws

and fixings," as Tom innocently called the bridal *trousseau*. That young gentleman, at Ethel's special request, had very condescendingly accepted his cousin's invitation, and consented to spend the weeks intervening before the wedding at the Hall, as Ethel insisted that she needed somebody to scold and to wait upon her. Though of rather an indolent disposition, yet on such an emergency he was indispensable; his quick wit and natural energy developing astonishingly by being brought into active service on an occasion like the present. He and Ethel employed themselves in writing invitations and letters, directing cards, and teasing each other during the intervals of business, to an extent which Mrs. Tremount declared to be absosolutely scandalous. Mrs. Farman, the good-natured housekeeper, and old Jenny, the cook, were more than once the victims of Tom's practical jokes, and even Mr. Tremount was not proof against his lively nephew's teasing proclivities. Indeed, he was quite irresistible, with his handsome face and overflowing good-humor, and the active household was kept in such a continual state of excitement, that Ethel was almost ready to declare, when Maud and her mother returned, accompanied by Bessie, that she had not missed them in the least, which polite admission she very wisely kept to herself.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WEE, MODEST, CRIMSON-TIPPED FLOWER."

"ETHEL, who is Maud going to have for bridesmaids besides you, and me, and Loo Preston?" asked Bessie one afternoon, as they were driving to Millford to attend to some shopping.

"She has asked Margaret Dudley, a ward of Mr. Graham's, to be fourth bridesmaid, at Harold's request."

"Margaret Dudley! I never heard of her before."

"Why, yes you have; she attends Madame de Lainey's school as parlor-boarder."

"There isn't a girl in school by the name of Dudley but one, and her name is Daisy."

"It must be the same one then, for I believe they call this Margaret Dudley *Daisy* for a pet name."

"If it is the Daisy Dudley who goes to our school, she is just the dearest little thing in the world," said Bessie, enthusiastically. "She is only sixteen, but she is very intellectual. I don't mean that she is brilliant, or quick, or that sort of thing, but all the teachers like her, she is so indus-

trious. Why, actually, Ethel, she is ahead of me in everything but history, and she is perfectly splendid in mathematics. She took the prize two years in succession in geometry and trigonometry, and she is welcome to it every year, as far as *I* am concerned, for I hate the very name of mathematics. Providence didn't bless me with a bump for that study, and it is quite beyond my comprehension to go any farther than cube-root, and even *that* I don't understand. But how on earth does it happen that Mr. Graham is Daisy's guardian?"

"Why, is there anything remarkable in that?"

"Of course there is. Seems to me he is rather young to have such a pretty ward."

"Is she so very pretty?"

"Well, no, not exactly beautiful, like you and Maud. Still, the girls rave about her at school, though she is the quietest and most reserved girl I ever met in my life. Her face is as white as a lily, and never has a trace of color in it, except when she is excited, and that isn't very often. Didn't somebody say once that some women's eyes were 'homes of silent prayer'? Well, Daisy's are too; they are perfectly heavenly in expression, and are as blue as the sky, with the softest, loveliest light in them, that sometimes she looks like an angel—and then her hair is just lovely! Dear me, I wish I were half as pretty as she is!"

"So you are, you little goose," said Ethel, laughing, "only you are more like a rose than a lily."

"And then," resumed Bessie, "Professor Dale said the other day that she looked like some Greek statue (I don't remember the name); and nobody would ever think of comparing me, with my *rétroussée* nose, to a piece of statuary. Loo Preston thinks she looks like an animated piece of dough; but then *her* opinion isn't worth a fig, she is so awfully jealous of her."

"Jealous of her for what reason, pray?"

"I'm sure *I* don't know, unless it is because she thinks I like Daisy better than I do her, which is a fact. Still, I cannot help admiring Loo, she is so handsome and smart. But she is as different from Daisy as the poles are apart, and they don't fancy each other much. Do you know who appointed Mr. Graham her guardian?"

"Harold told Maud that, while Mr. and Mrs. Dudley were in Europe with Daisy, two or three years ago, they were taken sick while at Rome, and died within a few days of each other of that terrible Roman fever. Mr. Graham, Senior, who was Mr. Dudley's partner, was travelling on the Continent at that time with his son, and had joined the Dudleys a short time previous; both Cecil and his father did everything for them during their illness, and before Mr. Dudley died he appointed Mr. Graham Daisy's guardian."

"But I thought Cecil Graham's father was dead?"

"So he is. He started for home with his son, accompanied by Daisy and her old nurse Martha,

but, upon reaching Florence, he was taken sick of the fever he contracted in Rome while nursing the Dudleys, and died shortly after their arrival. Of course it devolved upon Cecil to bring Margaret home, which he did as soon as possible, and placed her in Madame de Lainey's school, where she has remained ever since. I wonder where she spends her vacations ? "

" Summer before last she was not strong at all, so Madame took her to the sea-shore for a few weeks, and last summer she spent a month with one of the girls, and the rest of the time in New York."

" Poor little thing," said Ethel, compassionately ; " how lonely she must be. If Mr. Graham has no objection, why don't you ask her to spend the summer with us ? I know mamma would like to have her, and it would be very pleasant for us, now that Maud is going away so soon."

" But, Ethel, I have asked Loo Preston to spend a month with me after Maud is married, and she is dreadfully overbearing in her manner towards Daisy."

" Never mind, she shall not trouble her if I have anything to say about it. I shall take Daisy under my special protection. Loo and I are not on such friendly terms that she can presume to domineer over her while I am near."

" See, Ethel, there are Tom and Loo walking on the knoll now. She *is* an awful flirt. I fancy, however, that she cannot play her coquetries on

him very successfully; he out-manœuvres her completely."

"She appears to have taken a desperate fancy to Mr. Graham," said Ethel, looking away from her as she spoke. "I wonder what it will amount to?"

"Amount to! Why, he don't care a row of pins for her," replied Bessie, contemptuously. "Besides, I guess his guardianship of Daisy would interfere somewhat with her plans for him, unless she uses considerable artifice in the way she manages him."

"What! do you mean that Mr. Graham loves her?" asked Ethel, with a sinking heart.

"I am sure I don't know what *his* feelings are, but I *do* know that Daisy thinks everything of him. It never occurred to me, until you told me he was her guardian, that he must be the same Mr. Graham I've heard her speak of at school. But goodness! I never imagined *he* was the dashing, handsome Cecil Graham we know. I always thought he was some dear, good-natured old fogy, ancient enough to be her great-grandfather."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WEDDING.

THE day before the wedding had arrived. The old Hall was crowded with guests, among whom were Miss Preston, and Margaret Dudley, and a bevy of charming maidens, who fluttered about in their white draperies, filling the house with ringing laughter, and keeping Tom and his corps of gay young cavaliers in a transport of ecstasy and constant attention, by their pretty demands and fascinations.

Ashton, Graham, and George Temple kept bachelor's hall with Kingsland, at Hazlehurst; but walked over in the evening to Tremount Hall to rehearse their parts as groomsmen for the wedding on the ensuing day, and music, mirth, and merry laughter held their sway to a late hour in the grand old rooms and stately halls of the mansion. Maud, Ethel, and Bessie slept together that night, as every other room had been appropriated for the accommodation of their numerous guests.

Tender and loving were the sweet words of counsel and advice which the mother gave her eldest daughter in the retirement of her own little boudoir, before separating for the night.

"I wish I were not going to be married," cried Maud, as her mother kissed her good-night. "If you only could go with us, mamma, my happiness would be complete."

"My darling child, don't you know that you cannot always have me with you? Harold loves you devotedly, and after this parting is over you will be happier than you ever have been in your life. Cheer up, dearie, and dry your eyes; I want you to look like our royal Maud to-morrow," she said brightly, though the tears glistened in her own eyes. Smoothing Maud's hot brow with her cool, soft hand, she kissed her tenderly, and retired to her own room.

Morning dawned bright and beautiful over the green fields and wooden knolls of Tremount Hall. A slight shower during the night had refreshed everything, and tree, and shrub, and woodlawn sparkled with pearl-drops, the air was filled with the music of birds, and Nature seemed to lend all her charms to enhance the joyousness of the occasion. The green-houses and flower-gardens of Hazelhurst and the Hall had been robbed of their treasures, and brilliant garlands of flowers decorated the broad staircase and festooned every arch and doorway of the mansion. In the deep bay-window of the long drawing-room, the bridal bell, composed of the most exquisite of these floral beauties, hung pendent over a canopy of roses, and every table, bracket, and mantle glistened with the beautiful gems that summer gives.

An early lunch had been prepared, after which the ladies retired to their respective apartments to make their toilets. Ethel, Bessie, Miss Preston, and Daisy Dudley dressed in the same room, and amid the general confusion of skirts and dresses, flowers, ribbons, and laces, the distracted little French hair-dresser was driven to her wits' end, to satisfy the demand made upon her services. Daisy arranged her own hair, and the long, thick braids, wound around her shapely little head, looked like a golden coronal entwined with the graceful ivy leaves, which Ethel skilfully arranged for her.

"Ethel, as soon as you are ready, won't you please help Adèle lace my waist up," cried Bessie, despairingly, as her maid tried in vain to squeeze her plump little figure into the tightly fitting bodice. "That wretched dress-maker has made it at least two inches too small, and I can't get into it. What *shall* I do?"

"I will help you in an instant," replied her sister, as the last touches were given to her elaborately arranged hair. "There, Bessie, now take a long breath and hold it for a minute, and I guess we'll squeeze you in." Bessie held her breath till her face was purple, and after considerable pulling and jerking, she was finally laced up.

Panting from the exertion, she exclaimed, in a most distressed voice:

"Girls, I wouldn't wear such an abominable thing as this every day for a mint of money. But I suppose we ought to look as slender and graceful

as bean-poles at a wedding, and pretend we're comfortable, when we're almost dying of apoplexy."

"You must drink vinegar, and grow thinner, then, if you don't wan't to suffocate in a tight waist," said Miss Preston, as she stood before the pier-glass, admiring her own graceful figure.

"I think you are somewhat inclined to be *embonpoint* yourself," answered Bessie, sharply.

"Well, if I am, I don't lace enough to make my face look a full-blown peony," she replied, coolly drawing on her glove.

"If you don't now, you look very much like one sometimes, when Tom is talking to you."

"Hush! Bessie," said Ethel, reprovingly, "and you had better hurry a little, for it is almost time to go down."

"My patience, Ethel! what shall I do? I *never* can go downstairs with my face so red; it looks like a boiled lobster. Adèle *must* rip those seams somewhere, for I never can wear this waist as it is; I shall certainly have a fit before we reach the parlors."

"There is no use getting so impatient about it," said Ethel, going to her assistance. "Adèle, perhaps you can rip those seams a little, without taking off her bodice, and baste this lace over them. We can loop her over-skirt up higher, and spread out the bows of her sash, so the seams will never show. There, Bessie; how do you feel now?" she added, as the operation was completed.

"Ethel, you're an angel!" said the delighted Bessie, as she drew a long breath of relief, and throwing her plump, white arms round her sister's waist, she gave her an enthusiastic hug, thereby crushing the airy folds of her pretty bridesmaid's dress, to the unspeakable horror of Adèle.

"*Ah, mademoiselle, vous êtes parfaitement ravissante,*" exclaimed the excited little hair-dresser, as she pulled out the folds of Ethel's train, and put the finishing touches to her exquisite toilet. "*Les autres demoiselles sont belles, mais vous êtes la plus belle.*"

"Ah, now, madame," replied Ethel, laughing and blushing at the evident admiration expressed in madame's looks and tones. "*La robe de ma sœur et de ces autres demoiselles, sont exactement comme la mienne, et leurs visages sont plus belles.*"

"Loo, where's the glove-buttoner?" asked Bessie, searching among the innumerable ribbons, brushes, rats, and hairpins on the bureau.

"I don't know, my dear."

"Why, you had it a few minutes ago fastening your glove."

"Well, I put it on the window-sill, and it has probably rolled off on the roof, or dropped on the floor somewhere."

"I wish you would be more careful, and not lose things so provokingly."

"Take your shoe-hook; it will do just as well."

"My shoe-hook!" repeated Bessie, sharply, "why it would split out the little button-holes

in no time, and my glove is not over-loose any way."

"Here, Bessie, let me button your gloves for you," said Daisy, kindly. "I often button mine with a hair-pin, and it is just as good as a button-hook."

"Thank you ever so much, you dear little thing. Now I'm ready at last, and I reckon *you* are glad, Adèle."

"Ah, Miss Bessie, I likes to dress you, only but when you do be so haistee," replied the little maid, with a weary smile.

"Well, Adèle, I know I'm awfully troublesome, but I won't bother you any more; give me my handkerchief, you dear old thing," and patting her familiarly on her shoulder, Bessie danced across the room to Ethel, saying:

"Madame has told you that you look stunning, Ethel, so please be amiable and tell us if we look pretty."

"Why of course you do, you silly girl, and you know it without my telling you."

"No, we don't."

"Well, if I *must* gratify your vanity, I will inform you that I never saw any of you looking so charmingly as you do now. Daisy looks as wraith-like as Undine herself in her etherial loveliness—"

"Oh, please don't, Ethel," said Daisy, as a flush suffused her white cheek.

"Well, you do, darling, and I am only telling

you the truth. Loo looks like an eastern queen," she added, fastening in a flower which had dropped from that young lady's hair.

"And pray, Ethel, is your admiration exhausted on Loo and Daisy, that you haven't a word to say for me?" said Bessie, pouting.

"Why, you jealous little sister," said Ethel, laughing. "You look like a rose-bud and everything else that's pretty. If you want your faces admired any more, young ladies, consult your mirrors, and admire them yourselves. Now purse up your lips and look as proper as possible, for it is nearly five o'clock, and we will have to go downstairs in a few minutes. I must go in and see how Maud's toilet is progressing."

Entering her mother's dressing-room, she found Maud already dressed, and looking regally beautiful in her bridal robes. The heavy satin train hung in glistening folds from the graceful figure, and the rich point-lace veil, surmounted with a wreath of orange blossoms, enveloped her whole person; her exquisite neck and round white arms were encircled with a superb necklace and bracelets of pearl (Kingsland's last gift), and the *tout ensemble* was perfect.

"Oh, Maud, how perfectly lovely you look!" exclaimed Ethel, surveying her.

"Ethel, arn't you ashamed of yourself to be so vain?" said a masculine voice in the hall.

"Who is out there?" inquired Ethel, going to the door.

"I am," and Tom's curly head peeped in.

"You incorrigible boy, when *will* you ever learn manners? Who said you might come within these sacred precincts?"

"Don't be alarmed, my dear, I'm quite harmless. I heard Aunt Marion tell Kingsland that Maud was ready for the sacrifice, so I merely thought I'd come in and beg the sweet lamb not to bleat at the altar any more than may be actually necessary."

"You thought entirely too much nonsense, then," said Ethel, trying to look serene. "But as you've crossed the Rubicon, you may as well walk in farther and tell us how we look."

"Well, I think you look as much alike as two peas, only Maud has got a satin robe on, and you have on a musquito-netting."

"That is a pretty way to speak of my beautiful tulle dress."

"And I think you praised yourself immensely in expressing your admiration for Maud, for every word might just as well apply to you as to her, for you never looked so much alike before. Maud, you had better be careful that Kingsland doesn't marry her instead of yourself, by mistake; but of course both he and Graham will be able to distinguish you apart."

"Tom, are you gentlemen all ready?"

"We have been gloved and cravated this hour, and here comes Kingsland for his bride. As master of ceremonies, Ethel, I beg you to inform our

respective bridesmaids that we groomsmen are waiting for our partners."

As Ethel left the room, Kingsland entered it, accompanied by Mrs. Tremount, who looked almost as young as her daughters, in a handsome dress of rich black lace and diamonds. Kingsland stood for an instant dumb with admiration at the vision of loveliness before him; as he stepped forward to kiss Maud's blushing, downcast face, Tom drew him back, exclaiming:

"Ethel gave me special directions, my dear fellow, that no one should salute this lovely martyr but myself, until the sacrifice was over, for fear of disarranging that cobwebby thing on her head, so please swallow your impatience for a little while longer."

"The girls are all ready and waiting in the hall, Tom," said Ethel, entering the room, "so you had better come out and arrange us as we are to go downstairs. I will go and call papa."

As she walked down the long corridor to her father's room, she met Graham, who had just come out of the dressing-room.

"Have you *Fidelitas* with you?" he asked, detaining her.

"No, Mr. Graham, it is attached to my watch-chain, and is in my room."

"Shall I unlock it for you, to-night?"

"I think we had better wait until to-morrow," she replied.

"To-morrow, then, you shall see its contents," he returned, smiling. "Is the bride ready?"

"Yes; they are all waiting in the hall by mamma's boudoir. I shall be with you in an instant, as soon as I have summoned my dilatory father."

"Your first couple in the procession will be last in the wedding, according to Scripture," said Tom, arranging them in the order they were to descend the stairs.

"Here, Miss Daisy, step a little further forward, if you please; you look as soft and radiant as a full moon by the side of this dashing young knight. Temple, you are on the wrong side of this 'orbed maiden, with white fire laden;' to the right, my dear fellow."

"Mr. Clayton, we can dispense with sentiment for a little while, if you can afford to give it up," said Miss Preston, with a curl of her red lip.

"Ah, Miss Preston, did you speak? Have the kindness to step about three feet back of Miss Dudley," said the imperturbable Tom. "You really look charmingly," he added, regardless of the haughty glance with which she favored him. "Ashton, for goodness sake, don't twist your mustache so furiously. I know you feel half distracted to have Maud married, but you'll be a *Benedick* yourself before the year is out; and who knows but"—with a wicked glance at Miss Preston—"that lady on your arm will be your bride."

"I hope you feel consoled, Mr. Ashton," said Miss Preston, sarcastically.

But that gentleman was too much preoccupied to reply. He continued to gnaw his imperial as savagely as ever, and fidget with his glove, to the unspeakable annoyance of Miss Preston, who looked unutterable things at her gloomy and abstracted groomsman.

"Tom, are you *never* going to fix me?" said his impatient little bridesmaid, flirting her handkerchief in his face.

"Yes, little Queen Bess, as soon as I have arranged the rest of my flock. You'll have to stand in single blessedness until I return. Your Leicester will be with you presently," and bowing profoundly, he presented her with a superb bridal bouquet.

"Ethel, there is no necessity of my telling you and Graham how you look. I will simply remark, and my language is plain, that you make a mighty stunning-looking couple; that's all."

"And quite sufficient, too," replied Ethel, laughing and blushing. "Really, Tom, you are dreadfully personal in your remarks. I am afraid you have mortally offended Loo."

"I'm blissfully conscious of having mortally offended her ladyship every day since she has been here, so I fancy another little prick won't do her much harm."

"And now, Aunt Marion, it is your turn to be *fixed*, as Bessie says. Ethel informs me that I am personal in my remarks, but you must let me tell you that you look like a glorious Roman matron

of the 'brave days of old.' Kingsland, you are a happy dog"—slapping his shoulder affectionately —"long live thy mother-in-law—lord of—Hazelhurst.

"Now, Maud, last but not least in the ranks, are you ready to go down? Don't tremble so, my lamb; the farce will soon be ended. Here, Adèle, justez pullez-vous Mademoiselle Maud's robe out *uni peu*."

"For gracious sake, Tom, speak English to the girl. She understands it; and don't ventilate your French so freely," said Mr. Tremount.

"Don't look so ghastly pale, Maud," resumed her cousin, with concern. "Can't you muster up a little tinge of color in your cheeks?"

"Hush, Tom, and go and take your place by Bessie; she looks quite forlorn standing there alone," said his uncle.

"Well, good-by, Maud Tremount. I envy Kingsland from the bottom of my heart. You'll make a splendid wife. It is time to go down; Dr. Steadman is ready for us."

"Oh, Tom, isn't it awful?" whispered Bessie, as they were going downstairs.

"What, my dear?"

"Why, this getting married."

"I'm sure I don't know, having never been married before in my life; but if you like we will try the experiment and see how it goes. What do you say?"

"Nonsense! But, anyway, arn't you glad you are not in Maud's shoes?"

"I think it somewhat doubtful whether I could get into them," he replied plaintively, holding up one of his polished pumps. "Possibly I might be able to slip into Kingsland's, however."

"Hush!" came Ethel's warning voice from behind.

"Tom, you mustn't talk any more; Ethel is making faces for us to stop," said Bessie, turning around.

A fine band of music on the piazza struck up the *Wedding March* as the brilliant bridal train passed through the wide, old-fashioned hall. When Maud reached the drawing-room door, the music ceased, and a sudden hush fell upon every one; then a murmur of admiration ran from lip to lip as she swept through the stately room. Standing beneath the canopy of roses, she looked like an exquisite marble statue, so beautiful, so still and deathlike was her face.

Taking her position by Kingsland's side, her father placed her trembling hand in his: the solemn vows were uttered, the ring was on, and the irrevocable words pronounced which made them husband and wife. Kingsland raised her veil, and pressed the first kiss on his young wife's lips, and Maud Kingsland stood beside her husband receiving the congratulations of friends and relatives. The great doors of the dining-room were then thrown open, where the long table,

glittering with costly glass, rare china, and burnished silver, groaned beneath the weight of the sumptuous banquet. While laughter and merriment were at their height, Maud left the room unperceived, with her mother and Ethel, and ran upstairs to exchange her bridal robes for an elegant travelling suit. Kingsland waited for her at the side entrance, and after bidding father, mother, and sisters a tearful farewell, her husband lifted her into the carriage, the horses dashed down the avenue, and Maud and Harold Kingsland had started on their journey of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

ENTRE DEUX FEUX.

THE following morning there was a general exodus from the Hall, and no one remained of the numerous guests except the groomsmen, Daisy, and Miss Preston. The former had prolonged their visit to join a fishing excursion which Mr. Tremount had arranged for the next week.

The young ladies had taken their books and work to a cool, shady knoll near the house, whither camp-stools and chairs had been carried for their accommodation. The dark green elms and maples, robed in their luxuriant summer foilage, made a rich background, and the overhanging boughs of the trees formed a pretty rustic picture-frame to the fair young group beneath, seated in all sorts of graceful attitudes on the velvet turf. Miss Preston and Ashton were enjoying a quiet little flirtation under the trees. That gentleman had never entirely recovered from the mortification which Maud's sorrowful refusal had occasioned him, and he still entertained a most bitter remembrance of the event. He exhibited his resentment by retaliating on the rest of the sex who were weak or silly

enough to be infatuated by his artful fascinations, which, he vauntingly declared, could entangle the affections of any one of them. The wound still rankled in his bosom, but the ruling passion of his nature was too strong to be daunted by the rebuff he had received, and he was now testing his weapons on Miss Preston. Nothing loath for the encounter, she met him more than half-way, and desperate indeed was the conflict in which they were engaged.

Ethel took little pains to conceal the profound contempt she felt for this cold, unfeeling man, and the war of words frequently waged between them was anything but friendly.

Stretched on the grass at Miss Preston's feet, he repeated to her a heartless story which he had told Ethel the day previous, of one of his recent flirtations. He spoke with the evident intention of making her hear, as he frequently glanced from the smiling face of Miss Preston to Ethel's proud, beautiful profile, as she sat within a few feet of them.

Looking around suddenly, she said, ironically:

"Are you acquainted with these lines, Mr. Ashton?—

> "'Thy confidence to many shun to give;
> Full barns we lock, the empty open leave.'"

"That is quite a pretty quotation; may I ask where you obtained it?" he asked, coolly.

"It is found, I believe, in a little Icelandic poem

I once read. I merely quoted it, thinking you might possibly appreciate it."

"Ah, indeed! you are very kind; but I really cannot understand in what manner it is specially applicable to me."

"Perhaps you may be able to comprehend this quotation more readily:

> "'It is with feelings, as with waters—
> The *shallow* murmur, but the deep are dumb.'"

"And what inference may I draw from those absurd lines?" he asked, rising from his recumbent position, while a hot flush mounted his brow, as he observed the amused expression on Graham's face.

"You can draw what inference you please," answered Ethel, indifferently.

"Your meaning is too obvious to be misunderstood, but I cannot conceive what possible reason *you* can have for expressing your disapprobation of my actions in this way."

"Disapprobation is too feeble a word to express the utter contempt I feel for the unmanly and heartless manner in which you so coolly boast of your influence and fascinations over girls, many of whom unhappily imagine that a showy exterior indicates a true, manly heart."

"I do not claim to be the only one of my sex who is actuated by the motives you so decidedly denounce," he replied, with anger. "In fact, I think I am well sustained by the majority of them."

"Indeed! A very noble and manly sentiment, Mr. Ashton, and one worthy of you. But I should not think that the expression of such an opinion would be calculated to insure you many friends among those of your honorable and high-minded brethren."

"Neither do I think that your own fair sex is exempt from the crime of deceit and hypocrisy."

"If we are not, we at least have the good sense and sufficient respect for ourselves not to cast such a slur on our sisters in general," retorted Ethel.

"You very kindly quoted for my benefit, a few moments since, two choice lines of poetry; will you allow me to quote from the same poem (with which, by the bye, I am quite familiar) a stanza which I think can with equal propriety be applied to you, and the sex generally."

"I have no objection, if it will afford you any gratification."

Ignoring the sarcasm expressed in her tone, he languidly arose from his seat, and leaning against a tree, repeated in his soft, musical voice:

"'Trust not to one night's ice, to spring-day snow,
To serpent's slumber, or to maiden's vow;
For heart of woman turneth like a wheel,
And 'neath the snowy breast doth falsehood dwell.'"

Tom who had been carving Bessie's initials on a tree near by, turned around with a good-humored laugh, saying:

"By Jove, Ashton, that is a quencher! I

fancy you have had your own wings singed some time in your efforts to attract the butterflies around your lamp. But I say, a truce to this fight; what say you, Ethel? Miss Daisy looks as pained and frightened as if this detestable conversation were all about her. I vote for a cessation of hostilities; don't you, Miss Preston?"

"I think Mr. Ashton is quite able to sustain himself, and take care of his own affairs, without the interference of other people."

"So *you* take up the cudgel in his defence! Well, I must say you might lend your aid in a better cause."

"I do not see why I should not take up the cudgel—as you beautifully express it—in his behalf, as long as my views coincide with his."

"I presume, then, that you do not consider the last three lines of Ashton's chivalrous quotation, as specially derogatory to the veracity and sincerity of your sex. Well, well," with a mock sigh of resignation. "Love is blind, and there is no telling what a woman will say or do when she becomes entangled in Cupid's meshes."

"Really, Mr. Clayton, your rudeness is unbearable," she answered, angrily. "I am at a loss to imagine why I should never be able to express an opinion on any subject without being instantly assailed by a torrent of abuse from you."

"'Pon my honor, Miss Preston, I had no intention of being rude to you; indeed I had not," he replied, sticking his knife in the tree and looking at

her in amazement. "Your very ready approval of Ashton's ungallant speech, however, struck me with astonishment, for I must confess you are the first woman I ever knew who would openly acknowledge her sex to be false, even if in her secret heart she felt the charge to be just. For *my* part, I admire the ladies, and I love them too. As Mark Twain of blessed memory says, 'In all the relations of life, sir, it is but a just and grateful tribute to woman, to say that she is a brick. In whatever position you place her, sir, she is an ornament to that place she occupies, and a treasure to the world. As a sweetheart she has few equals and no superiors; as a cousin she is convenient,' with a graceful bow to Ethel, who smiled bewitchingly. 'What, sir, would the peoples of the earth be without woman? They would be scarce, sir, almighty scarce. Then let us cherish her—let us protect her—let us give our support, our encouragement, our sympathy—ourselves, if we get a chance. Woman is lovable, gracious, kind of heart, beautiful—worthy of all respect, of all esteem, of all deference.' I say blessed be the ladies. Yes," he resumed in more tragic tones, "of old ocean she is the purest gem; of the mine, the rarest jewel; of the garden, the loveliest flower; of the heavens, the brightest star. What more *can* I say! Of all creatures, she is the *ne plus ultra*, and to my heart of hearts I clasp the precious treasure—metaphorically speaking, of course." With a graceful bow to his amazed audience, he resumed his carv-

ing, seemingly unconscious of the astounding impression he had produced.

"If you had lived during the days of Rowena and Lady Edith Plantagenet, you would have been knighted on the spot, Clayton," said Graham, laughing.

"He has displayed more energy in making that speech, than I ever thought him capable of even *feeling* before," said Miss Preston, in a low voice to Ashton.

Tom, however, had caught the words, and looking at her, said, warmly:

"So you think I am not possessed of energy or ambition for anything but that of playing the gallant, gay Lothario, and dancing attendance on you ladies."

"Precisely. For I never saw you exert either in any other cause. Perhaps you have been waiting, like Mr. Micawber, 'for something to turn up.'"

"It is because he never has had an opportunity to show what he really can do—have you, Tom?" said Bessie consolingly, as she noticed the storm gathering on his brow.

"There are plenty of ways for a man to make opportunities for himself, if he wishes to show of what calibre he is," said Ethel, intending her remark for Ashton.

Tom, however, applied it to himself, and said, bitterly:

"Circumstances make men, and mine have been

such that I have just drifted along the current of life, without ever meeting with an obstacle against which to test my strength. But the time *will* come when you may have reason to change your minds. By heavens!" he added vehemently, while his eyes flashed and his whole figure trembled with passionate emotion, "I had rather have been Robespierre himself, with all his damnable character and fiendish cruelty, than the man I am."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at their feet, it could not have confounded the little group more than Tom's words did. Having delivered himself of this astounding sentiment, he walked off some distance, and leaned moodily against a tree, with head erect and eyes burning with the new and unwelcome thoughts which Miss Preston's scathing words and Ethel's unintentional reproof had fired within him.

No one spoke a word for a few minutes. The uncomfortable silence was suddenly broken by Bessie exclaiming, in a startled voice:

"Hark! don't you hear some one screaming?"

"The stables are on fire," said Tom, hastening toward her.

At that instant, a dense cloud of smoke, followed by a burst of flame, arose in that direction. Bounding over two or three rustic benches which stood in his way, Tom ran swiftly down the long sloping knoll, across the lawn, followed quickly by Graham and Temple. As Miss Preston watched his graceful figure, as he leaped rather than ran, his

feet barely touching the ground, she began to entertain a feeling of pity and contempt for the lazy, elegant figure beside her, tenderly holding the parasol over her head.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRAVELY AND RIGHTLY.

WHEN Tom arrived at the barn, he found a frightened group of men, women, and children from the various farms and places in the vicinity standing within the stable-yard. Carriages of all descriptions were huddled together in one corner, saddles, harness, carriage robes and blankets were scattered about or heaped up promiscuously in other parts of the yard, and the wildest confusion reigned everywhere. A small fire-engine, belonging to Mr. Tremount, was playing upon the burning building, but the stream of water it sent up fed rather than quenched the flames.

"Where are the horses?" demanded Tom of one of the men.

"And indade, sir, William is trying to get 'em out, but the craythures won't budge, it's so frightened they be."

Rushing into the stable, Tom saw the coachman and another man vainly endeavoring to release the frantic animals. Maud's horse had become cast in his stall, and both men were working desperately to raise him. Mr. Tremount's handsome roan, who had an enclosed stall to himself, was

standing on his hind legs, pawing the air, and snorting with terror. The almost human screams and cries of the animals, as the hungry flames roared and crackled around them, were horrible to hear. Springing upon the partition between the stalls, Tom dexterously threw a rope around the roan's neck, and pushing back the door, dragged the frightened creature out and left him to one of the men. One after the other, the horses were pulled out, rearing, kicking, struggling, and taken to a place of safety. The insufficient water-power had given out, the well, and small pond in the rear had been drained, and nothing now could be done to save the doomed building. The loft, which was well stocked with hay, had caught fire, and dense black clouds of smoke filled the air. Tom and Graham were standing together watching the flames shoot out from the windows and lapping the edges of the roof, when a piercing scream rent the air, and a woman's voice, crying out, "O my child! my child! Where is he?" was heard far above the din and confusion.

Both gentlemen sprang toward her, but, Tom, pushing Graham back, grasped the woman's arm, saying:

"Where is he? tell me quickly."

"In the hay-mow with another," she shrieked, in tones of heart-rending anguish.

Wetting his hankerchief in the horse-trough, Tom quickly bound it over his mouth, and rushed into the smoke and flames. The whole place was in

an uproar; shrieks of women and children, mingled with the hoarse voices of the men, produced a scene of horror and confusion indescribable. Graham's clear, cool voice could then be heard above the din, and the horror-stricken throng soon recognized a master-spirit among them. By his directions, they gradually retreated from the immediate vicinity of the burning pile, leaving an open space in front of the hay-loft, where assistance could be rendered Tom, if necessary.

A sudden hush had fallen upon the crowd, when a voice cried out:

"There they are—the children!"

Looking up, Graham saw two little white faces peering between the wooden slats of the wide window in the apex of the roof; at the same time a man's arm was passed around them, and Tom's voice, heard above the roar of the flames, called out:

"A rope on the roof—the hay is on fire—don't lose a moment!"

An instant after, his form emerged from the trap-door in the roof, bearing both children in his arms. A ladder extended from this opening to the gutter, and on this rested their only chance of escape. Holding the children with one hand, he swung himself over on the ladder, and then slowly crawled down the sloping roof, grasping the rounds of the ladder with the other. A fearful stillness reigned over the crowd below; the very flames themselves seemed to stand still to watch.

Two attempts were made to throw the rope on

the burning roof, but each time it fell a few feet short. Graham then took it, and, summoning all his strength, with one powerful effort he threw the coil to the foot of the ladder. Hastily making a noose, Tom slipped it under the arms of the larger child, a little fellow of five, and gently lowered him into the arms of strong men below. The flames were rapidly approaching him—they circled in little eddies around the edge of the roof, and then, with a deep, seething roar, leaped out of the trap-door, catching the ladder and spreading over the roof.

"For God's sake, the rope—the roof is falling!" shouted Tom, hoarsely.

Again the rope was thrown. He grasped it, and tying it quickly around the baby form in his arms, commenced to lower him. But the flames had reached him, and the rope had caught. As the little one was within ten or twelve feet of the ground, the rope snapped. Graham had foreseen the danger, and caught the child in his arms.

All eyes were now centred on Tom. Death seemed inevitable. It frowned upon him from the depth beneath, and stretched forth its forked tongues of living fire above and around him. Prayers from the ashen lips of women were breathed for the brave fellow who had imperilled his life for the toddling little ones now folded in their mothers' arms. Deep groans issued from the awe-stricken group of men, as they gazed with blanched faces at the solitary figure above them.

The flames roared and hissed around him; they streamed above his head, and seemed mockingly to laugh, as they slowly wrapped him in their fiery embrace.

His quick eye had noticed an angle in the roof yet untouched by the fierce monster. Stepping carefully along the burning, quivering gutter to the corner, he let himself down by the pipe till he reached the heavy bar that ran from one corner of the gable to the other. Hanging by his hands, he slowly made his way along the bar till his feet touched the upper frame-work of a door leading into the barn. Breathless and exhausted, his strength almost gone, he was just ready to drop from his still perilous position. But strong arms were there to receive him. Graham had secured a ladder, and, placing it against the tottering wall, quickly mounted it, and caught the noble fellow in his arms. Encircling him within his powerful grasp, he descended, but not a moment too soon. The heavy oak rafters had given way, and with a mighty crash the great roof fell in, sending up a cloud of burning cinders, smoke, and flame, which could be seen for miles around.

The walls trembled like a reed for one brief instant, and then fell in upon the blackened, quivering mass of rafters, beams, and chimneys.

A long, loud shout of joy rent the air as Tom approached the crowd, leaning on Graham's arm. As he stood there, begrimed, scorched, and exhausted, women sobbed aloud for joy, and strong

men gathered around him with faces and lips eloquent with praise and thankfulness at his deliverance. As soon as he could, Graham assisted him to the house. Cheer after cheer followed him from the transported group, and it was with difficulty that Temple and Graham could prevent his overjoyed admirers from carrying him to the Hall on their shoulders.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT ETHEL THINKS OF WOMEN DOCTORS.

IT was the day after the fire. Tom lay stretched out at full length on the sofa in the cool, breezy dining-room, where the family had gathered for lunch.

"I wonder where Bessie can be," said Ethel, who was helping out strawberries at the head of the table.

"Here I am," replied that young lady, limping into the room,

"What mischief have you stumbled into now?" inquired Tom, raising himself up on his elbow, and regarding her rumpled dress and disorderly appearance with some curiosity.

"I have been out visiting the 'burnt district,' as they say in the newspapers, with papa; and, Tom, I actually believe if you had been there, Mrs. Ryan, whose child you saved yesterday, would have fallen down and worshipped you."

"By Jove! I wish I had been, for I should like uncommonly to experience the novel sensation of being idolized for once in my life."

"Well, you have had praises enough heaped upon you to have turned any other head but yours,

you dear old fellow. But, Tom, if you had on a checked shirt now, you would look amazingly like an escaped convict," she said, seating herself at the head of the sofa, and smoothing his head.

He did indeed, with his closely shaven head, which the fire had singed; his white forehead, too, bore the marks of the deadly conflict in which he had been engaged the day previous, while his curling brown mustache had been shaved off, revealing a sweet though manly mouth, which Bessie declared was a "shame to keep covered up, even if he *did* have a handsome mustache."

"You have not told us yet the cause of your remarkable gait," said Tom, opening his mouth to receive a strawberry which Bessie offered him.

"Well, sir, as I was returning through the garden, Don raced after me, and before I was aware of his intentions, his fore-paws were on my shoulders. He had just been taking a bath in the foot and a half of water left in the duck pond, and spattered me from head to foot. I rushed up the front steps to avoid another impending embrace, and stumbled over the mat, scraping the cuticle off my *tibia*—and that's the reason I can scarcely walk."

"You did *what?*" exclaimed Miss Preston.

"I'll tell you," interposed Tom, in a loud whisper. "She *barked her shin.* Is that delicate explanation more explicit?"

Miss Preston looked horrified, and felt inclined to resent his impertinence by a smart box on his

ears ; but fearing that such an unladylike exhibition of temper would shock Mr. Ashton, she swallowed her anger, and devoted her attention to her strawberries.

"You should not use such ungentlemanly language before young ladies," said Ethel, with a reproving tap on his shoulder.

"It was not impolite in the least. I think it much more courteous and reasonable for people to talk in plain English, which ordinary mortals can comprehend, than to use technical terms which no one but a physician can understand."

"No one but a physician, indeed! I fancy that your knowledge is very limited," said Ethel, quickly.

"I confess I am somewhat of an ignoramus on that subject. While I was at the University, two or three of the fellows asked me to accompany them to the dissecting-rooms of the medical college one day. Being afflicted with a small amount of Mother Eve's proverbial curiosity, I consented, and went with them. Gracious! the very remembrance of the scene sickens me, and I vowed never to enter such a chamber of horrors again, which vow I have most religiously kept. Actually, Graham, I made a perfect fool of myself, and nearly fainted ; and the fellows had to drag me out of the place. What can possess those strong-minded females of the Blackwell stamp to follow the profession of medicine, is quite beyond my comprehension."

"Then your comprehension cannot be very vast," said Ethel, while Bessie sang out in her clear, bird-like voice :

> "Oh, woman ! in thine hour of ease,
> Uncertain, coy, and hard to please ;
> When pain and anguish wring the brow,
> A ministering angel thou."

"There, Tom, Bessie has just expressed in those lines what my ideas of a true woman are. I think there are many of our sex admirably fitted for the discharge of still higher duties than those of mere nurses. I believe we should all better understand our physical being, its wants, and the treatment necessary in sickness ; and when there are opportunities afforded for the study of medicine and its practice, I see no reason why a woman should not follow the dictates of her wishes—if they run in that direction—and make the amelioration of the ills of humanity the business of her life."

"But do you think, Miss Ethel," said Graham, regarding her animated countenance with curious interest, "that a woman could endure with steady, unfaltering courage the severe experience through which physicians often pass ?"

"Why, yes," she replied, reddening a little. "She might call in the skill of a surgeon when necessary, for I believe that many a woman, as well as many a man, may be a good physician, and yet shrink from the use of the knife and scalpel ; besides, the study of medicine would teach her to

watch over the sick and dying with steadier nerve and courage, even though her heart were full of tenderness and sympathy for their sufferings."

"But do you think that women are moulded, either mentally or physically, so as to follow the profession of medicine with the exactness and thoroughness it requires? It is a noble and responsible office for any man to assume, with the feeling that it is the business of his life, the chief end and aim of his existence, to repair the injuries which sin, disease, and accident have done to impair and weaken our poor humanity. How often does it happen that a woman, as soon as she has learned a profession, is married; and tell me of what use then is the knowledge she has acquired, after years of harassing study? Frequently, in after-life, she is thrown upon her own resources, in which case, some occupations which she may have followed in her earlier years, such as book-keeping, the management of the telegraph, or even editorship, may then be of avail to her. As far as medicine is concerned, however, it would be utterly useless for her to attempt the practice of it, at least as a general physician, for it requires constant study and practice to keep up with the profession."

"You think," returned Ethel, warmly, "that women are not sufficiently well-educated to embrace the learned professions—that we labor under great disadvantages from our want of thoroughness, and from our not devoting enough time to study, and, in most cases, from the interference of

domestic duties. Well, I acknowledge all these difficulties, and that in most cases the sphere of woman is home—it is her happiest lot. But there are many—widows and those without homes or domestic ties to bind them—who appear called by circumstances to bear the conflicts of life ; and if such a one chooses to prepare herself by study to minister to the sick and suffering, why should she not be honored in her choice, and adopt that noblest of all professions next to the ministry—that of medicine ? "

" Good gracious, Ethel ! " exclaimed Miss Preston, horrified at Ethel's sentiments. " How *can* you talk so enthusiastically about such a cruel profession ? "

" Cruel, indeed ! You are very much mistaken, Loo, if you think physicians, as a class, are cruel or unfeeling. As a general thing, they are the kindest-hearted men in existence. They know exactly how much people have to suffer, and sometimes, if they do cause pain, it is only when it is really necessary."

" It is well enough for a man to be a doctor, but, positively, the very idea of a woman being a physician makes me shudder. Not all the gold of Crœsus would tempt *me* to be one."

" I presume your gentle nature shrinks from the idea," remarked Tom, sneeringly. " But, indeed, my dear Miss Preston, don't worry yourself about it, for I don't think any one would employ you if you were a doctress. You'd be sure to prescribe

some horrible poison by mistake, and cause some unhappy soul to shuffle off this mortal coil sooner than he expected."

"I should most assuredly order some powerful dose which would end *your* existence without delay, if I had you for a patient," she retorted.

"Thank you for the warning. I rather fancy I should be induced to treat you ditto; so, if you value your life, never send for Dr. Thomas Clayton. Miss Daisy," he added, turning towards her, with a bright, kind smile on his genial face, "what do you think of women physicians?"

"I do not disapprove of them at all," she replied, in a sweet, low voice. "But I do not think my inclinations run in that direction."

"I know how Daisy would doctor people," said Ethel, patting the slender little hand that rested in her own. "She would

> "'—minister to the mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow.'"

"Well, Ethel, if *I* should ever be sick, there is no one I would rather have attend me than your own noble self," she whispered, nestling close to Ethel's side, as if claiming her protection.

"You dear little thing," answered Ethel, kissing her tenderly; "you would be a precious charge, darling, and a very lovely one, too."

Catching the pleased smile which, for an instant, flashed in Graham's eye, she flushed deeply.

That glance of approval seemed to influence her every action during the remainder of the day, and, unconsciously, her manner became more friendly and gracious toward him than it had been since Daisy's arrival.

"Bessie Bunch, just think what a discussion your wounded tibia, or whatever you call it, has provoked from our goodly company," said Tom, as he helped his cousin upstairs. "Does it hurt you much now, little girl?" he added, as she limped along, leaning on his arm.

"No, not much; but don't you know how ridiculous you feel when you've hurt your funny-bone? You feel just like laughing and crying together; and my present condition is an aggravation of that, only I'm hot and tired besides."

"Well, I'll play physician for once, and prescribe bathing this very rosy face of yours in cold water, after which you must take a nap, and you'll feel as fresh as a rose-bud to take a ride on horseback after supper. Give me a kiss, little cousin, for payment, and I'll let you go."

"No, I won't do any such thing," replied his refractory patient, running into her room and closing the door, so that only her curly golden head peeped out. "I'm getting too old, Tom, for you to treat me like a baby any longer. 'Tisn't proper, even if you are my cousin."

"Pshaw, Bessie! how old *are* you, anyway?"

"I'm nearly eighteen, sir, and consequently think I'm old enough to decide between what's proper

and what isn't. So please go downstairs and pay your *devoirs* to Loo and Daisy, and leave me; for I'm awfully sleepy."

"Well, you *are* complimentary, to prefer your own society to mine."

"Tom, my love, don't you know that we ladies *do* get tired of you gentlemen sometimes, and we like to be by ourselves once in a while—"

"Just to think over what you'll do next to bewitch and infatuate us by your fascinations, you artful little woman," interrupted her cousin.

"We *never* seek to entangle the affections of you gentlemen, until we see that you'd like to be caught."

"That's all nonsense, and you know it, though you pretend to be so innocent about it."

"By the way, I must tell you a little secret, which you can keep or not, as you or vanity please. We girls appreciate the society of gentlemen much more after a reasonable absence than we do when you are with us all the time."

"A polite hint, I suppose, for me to leave you."

"Exactly; please go down stairs, for I am dreadfully tired standing here."

"Well, I'll be off in an instant; but let me tell you, if you have such ridiculous, new-fangled notions of propriety in your absurd little cranium, by all means take a nap and sleep them off. But as for my going downstairs and talking to those girls this blessed afternoon, I beg to be excused. Miss Preston is continually getting me into hot water,

and I am constantly incurring Ethel's displeasure by my ungentlemanly behavior. She is a trump, that's a fact; but now that she is Miss Tremount, she has risen two pegs higher in dignity. Daisy is a darling; but she is so awfully angelic, I am on the look-out all the time to see her float off on some passing zephyr when I say anything a little startling. So you see, sweetheart, you are my only hope, and a very forlorn one at that, if you leave me now in my demoralized condition, for I have a fearful headache besides."

"You poor afflicted boy! You seem to have swallowed a double dose of the blues this afternoon," said Bessie, laughing. "Follow your own prescription, return to your *sanctum* in the tower, and take a *siesta*, and I know you will feel as chirp as a cricket when you awake."

Shutting the door in his face, she threw herself on the bed, and soon dropped asleep.

The conversation in the library flagged wofully, notwithstanding Ethel's efforts to sustain it. Miss Preston did not attempt to suppress an occasional yawn, which Temple found to be quite contagious. Ashton was listlessly turning over the leaves of an album with Daisy, but his very apparent lack of interest disconcerted her, and she left her chair by the table and sat down by Ethel. Graham was the only wide-awake member of the company, and as Ethel caught the amused look in his eye, she said laughingly:

"Come, girls, let us leave the gentlemen to their

own devices for a while. I really believe they are tired of us."

Looking back as she walked toward the door, she added:

"You will find papa's study at your disposal, for smoking, reading, or a nap. Supper will be ready at six o'clock, after which we are all expected to be prepared for a ride on horseback. *Au revoir!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

A MAN'S REQUIREMENTS.

NO sooner had the young ladies left the room, than Ashton, throwing himself on the sofa, said with a yawn:

"That was a blessed exodus of females! Miss Ethel made a happy hit for once in her life, in suggesting that we might possibly like to be left to our own sweet wills for a while this afternoon."

"Your pleasant little tilt with her on the knoll yesterday is doubtless the cause of your unwonted constraint in her presence," remarked Temple, who who was sitting on the piazza near a window, smoking a cigar.

"Those Tremount girls keep a fellow on the stretch the whole time," resumed Ashton, without noticing the quiet sarcasm. "One is a hoyden and the other a prude. Miss Preston is the only member of the fair quartette worth the trouble of entertaining."

"And a precious small amount of brains she must be possessed of, to be satisfied with the soft flatteries and tom-fooleries with which you treat her," said Tom indignantly. He had returned to

the library for a book, and had overheard Ashton's not over-polite speech.

"We won't discuss her brains, if you please; she has money and a pretty face, what more would a man desire," replied Ashton lazily.

"Money and a pretty face! Bah, what are *they* worth! One fades, and the other takes wings and flies away."

"I fancy they will both last as long as I need them."

"Really, Ashton, I gave you credit for possessing more feeling, to say nothing of common-sense. A faded, homely, witless wife, without even money to make her endurable! Heavens! May the Fates deliver me from such a woman!"

"Don't get excited, my dear fellow," said Ashton coolly. "There is no such doom awaiting me, I assure you. What fortune I possess is well invested. Miss Preston is a wealthy heiress in her own right, and has a rich old uncle besides; so if she sees fit to link her fate with mine, I rather imagine the world would smile approvingly, and pronounce us a happy couple."

"You speak as if the thing were all cut and dried. As you do not appear to be particularly embarrassed by the presence of Graham and Temple, may I ask if you are engaged to the young woman?"

"Not at present," drawled Ashton. "A little more perseverance on my part, however, will secure me my game when I need it."

"You must give the devil his due; I certainly gave Miss Preston more credit than to suppose that she would become entangled so easily in the trap you are setting for her."

"Oh, I don't consider her a paragon by any means. She is no better and no worse than the rest of her sex, though she is a trifle more entertaining than some of them."

"Confound you, Ashton! you have no more regard for a woman than the veriest old Modoc. I suppose the girl thinks *you* have money. Well, she'll be blissfully enlightened after the knot is tied."

"I do not believe there is a girl in existence who would not barter her happiness for money, if she had to decide between the two. Even your strong-minded cousin, Miss Ethel, would risk her chance of happiness if a rich fellow came along."

Graham, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, looked up from the book which he had been abstractly turning over, and said sternly:

"Your unjust and heartless denunciation of woman is unpardonable, Mr. Ashton; you certainly can be but half in earnest. I do not like to hear a man decry woman even in joke. She is God's last, best gift to man. I am not an admirer of the gay butterfly of fashion, the strong-minded woman, or the brilliant coquette; but there is nothing on earth so beautiful, in my estimation, as a woman with the purity and loveliness of an angel, —one who has moral courage to adorn her family

and society with her unselfish, untiring devotion to all that is noble and virtuous."

"And may I ask if you have taken Miss Ethel as your text in delivering this touching eulogium on her sex?" inquired Ashton, in a cool, insolent tone.

"Yes, I did take her for my 'text,' as you express it," replied Graham with some warmth. "She possesses all the characteristics that make a woman beautiful and holy in my opinion. If dark clouds of sorrow or adversity should ever envelop her, her strong womanly spirit would rise triumphant over the storm."

Ashton was silent, though the sarcastic smile on his face showed that he did not appreciate Graham's reproof. Tom grasped his hand, saying warmly:

"The world would be the better, Cecil, if we all entertained the same pure, high-minded ideas of honor towards woman that you do."

"I had a mother once—a noble, Christian woman—and from her I derived my elevated ideas of what a true woman should be," he answered earnestly.

"Your views are rather utopian to agree with the generality of men," said Ashton.

"Indeed they are not, begging your pardon," interposed Tom. "Would to Heaven we all had such mothers. Come up to my room and have a smoke, Graham; I feel in a *dolce far niente* mood this afternoon. Ashton, I would advise you to

read the last chapter of *Proverbs*, and see if your exalted ideas of Miss Preston coincide with those of that wise old reprobate who, as a vender of proverbs, had no equals."

Ashton watched them leave the room with a smile of mingled bitterness and incredulity on his face, and then settled himself for a nap.

CHAPTER XX.

A LITTLE SCHEME.

AT the appointed hour, the young ladies appeared on the piazza, where the gentlemen had already assembled in their riding suits with high-top boots and spurs. Ethel looked exquisitely lovely as she stood in the doorway, holding up her long, dark riding habit, which displayed to advantage her graceful figure. The stylish little velvet cap, with its long black plume floating over her chesnut braids, was wonderfully becoming to the fair young face, and as Graham assisted her to mount her horse, he said in a tone which thrilled her:

"Do you know that I never saw you looking lovelier or sweeter than you do this afternoon."

"And do you know that you should not say such naughty things to me," she replied laughingly, touching him with her whip, as the ever-ready color dyed her cheeks.

"Admiration and compliments are not to be forbidden if they come from the heart," said Graham meaningly.

"How am I to know that they do?" she asked lightly.

"Because you cannot mistake the evidence of your senses, nor what your own heart tells you."

"The rest of the party are all ready," said Ethel, changing the dangerous subject abruptly.

Graham rode Kingsland's fiery steed, Saladin, as the other gentlemen had declined the honor of mounting him. He was a superb horse of pure Arabian breed, and still retained some of the wild, untamable spirit of his desert ancestry. His gigantic height was not disproportioned to the sleek, slender limbs and small polished hoofs, while his satiny jet-black coat and long silken tail and mane evinced the pride and care of his owner. Few could manage him but Kingsland and his groom, and it was with great difficulty that Graham could mount him. He swerved to one side of the road then to the other, and snorted with angry impatience at the iron hand on his rein. Placing his foot in the stirrup, Graham vaulted into the saddle, and then proceeded to discipline his mettlesome charger by administering a severe whipping, which finally reduced him to submission. Though he danced and curveted from side to side down the avenue, he no longer attempted to throw his powerful rider, who sat his saddle as if horse and man were one. Graham's perfect horsemanship was the theme of every one's admiration, and Ethel secretly exulted that no one in the party could manage the fiery horse but the noble-looking man at her side, on whom she had unresistingly lavished her heart's warmest affections.

As the gay cavalcade dashed through the quiet streets of Millford, many a glance of envy and admiration was thrown on them from dame and damsel, chatting and gossipping in the doorways and tiny verandas of their cosey little houses, and from knots of boys and men gathered in groups before the little post-office and around the street corners, awaiting the distribution of the evening mail.

The brilliant sunset had faded in the glowing west, and the sun had sunk to rest on the rosy billows of clouds, far below the horizon ; the soft evening twilight had stolen over the earth, and one by one the stars peeped out of the quiet skies, till the whole purple vault of heaven was studded with their twinkling hosts. The full, round moon came forth in her glory, flooding hill and valley, mountain and lake, with her silvery light; the flowers had long ago closed their leaves, and the birds were nestling in their little homes among the trees ; the soft evening wind whispered gently among the leafy boughs of the forest, and a peaceful stillness brooded over the sleeping earth.

Ethel and Graham had fallen to the rear of the party, and as they trotted over the smooth, gravelly road which wound through the beautiful wood bounding Tremount Hall, Graham's horse suddenly reared and plunged, almost throwing him by the violence of his movements.

" What is the matter," cried Ethel in alarm, as

Graham rode his horse up to a tree and sprang off.

"My saddle girth has loosened," he replied, drawing off his gloves, "and I must tighten it before this fractious animal displays any more resentment."

"What are you stopping here for?" inquired Miss Preston, turning back with Ashton.

"My saddle turned; that is all," answered Graham quietly. "Ashton, lend me your knife an instant," he added; "the hole is broken in the strap, and I must make another; I fancy this saddle is rather old and not very secure."

"I have a piece of news for you, Ethel," said Miss Preston, while the gentlemen were repairing Graham's saddle. "Did you know that Daisy Dudley is engaged to Mr. Graham?"

"To Mr. Graham! What do you mean!" said Ethel, nearly betraying herself.

"I mean simply this, as Mr. Ashton and I were walking in the garden this morning after breakfast, we accidentally stumbled upon Miss Dudley and her lover, sitting in the most *recherchê* attitude possible for a *téte-á-téte* in the arbor near the fountain. Of course we did not like to interrupt them, and were just about to retrace our steps, when Mr. Graham called out, and asked us to join them."

"A thing which he would hardly have done, had he been specially interested," said Ethel coolly.

"Well, you wait a moment and I'll inform you of the *dénouement*," she replied maliciously. "Daisy immediately sprang up, and left Mr. Graham, who walked over towards the barn with Mr. Ashton, to look at the *points*—as they call it—of that horrible horse of Mr. Kingsland's. As a matter of course, I congratulated Daisy, who turned as red as a peony, and looked so exceedingly conscious, that I knew she was engaged, and would not have believed her if she had denied it, which she didn't."

"I am sure Mr. Graham could not have a lovlier wife than Daisy will make him, and she certainly has made a very happy choice. But I do not think that the mere fact of your coming upon them unexpectedly in the arbor, and of Daisy's blushing and looking conscious, is any positive proof of an engagement existing between them."

"Positive proof! Why, I think there is *every* reason to believe they are engaged, and you would think so too, if you could have seen the lover-like attitude in which I found them."

"If you judge of people's engagements by the touching positions they assume when together, I presume I may have the honor of congraulating you and Mr. Ashton," said Ethel, with ill-concealed contempt.

"Well, would it be anything remarkable if we should be engaged?" she answered with irritation.

"Not at all; as a general thing, however, a lady and gentleman do not become engaged on *quite* so

short acquaintance as a week or ten days," she replied, turning her horse's head.

"Where are you going?" demanded Miss Preston, placing her hand on Selim's rein.

"I have something pretty to say to Mr. Ashton," answered Ethel, ironically.

"Good gracious! you surely are not going to congratulate him!"

"And why not, pray? Is it not considered the thing to congratulate people on their engagements?" she asked innocently.

"But I did not say I was engaged to him, and if you have one spark of consideration for me, don't, for mercy's sake, say a word to him on the subject."

"You led me to infer that you were engaged to him," said Ethel, contemptuously. "Do not be disturbed, however; I will not mention the delicate subject to him; you see I have some consideration for your feelings, though you have so little for Daisy's. But Loo, let me give you a word of advice," she added earnestly; "if you are not engaged to a gentleman, do not, for the sake of exciting the curiosity or jealousy of others, pretend that you are. And on the other hand, it is not either truthful or charitable to spread the report of another girl's engagement, unless you are not only positive that it is a fact, but have authority from the young lady to circulate the intelligence. The gentlemen are ready, so we may as well ride on."

Ashton and Graham had mounted their horses, the former joining Miss Preston, who had started somewhat in advance, and cantered off through the woods with her to the Hall. Graham placing a detaining hand on Selim's rein, said to Ethel :

"Walk your horse, will you not? It is too lovely to return home so soon."

For a few moments they rode on in silence. Graham looked straight ahead through the darkness, as if his very existence depended upon his keeping a direct course along the road, while Ethel was tortured with painful doubts and fears. The thought of Graham's engagement to Daisy was unbearable ; he had shown unmistakable proofs of his attachment for her in his tones, looks, and the gentle courtesy with which he always treated her, although no uttered word of love had passed between them. She was not conscious herself of the love she entertained for him, nor how deeply he was centred in every thought and affection of her heart, until she learned the bitter intelligence from Miss Preston, of his love for his young ward.

She was suddenly aroused from her troubled thoughts by Graham, who said abruptly :

" Miss Ethel, what do you think of Daisy ? "

The poor girl felt as if she had been stabbed, so cruel and unexpected was his question ; and she was thankful that the friendly shadows of the great trees overhead concealed her pale face from the moonlight. But not a tremor in her voice be-

trayed the anguish which the import of his words occasioned her, as she answered quietly:

"She is very sweet and lovely, Mr. Graham, and just as good and pure as her face is beautiful."

"High words of commendation for one young lady to express for another; I should feel more than complimented, were I in Daisy's place, to have such an opinion expressed of me."

"She is well worthy of it, as well as of your love," replied Ethel, warmly, forgetting her own musing in the thought of her fragile little friend.

"My love!" repeated Graham in surprise. "Well, she is a dear little thing, and I am very fond of her, but do you know that she loves you better than any one else in the world?"

"With the exception of yourself," responded Ethel, with a feeble attempt to laugh. "I took a fancy to Daisy the first moment I saw her; her sad history interested me deeply, and I love her now as if she were my sister, though I see no reason why she should love me particularly."

"Love begets love," he answered, bending towards her, and taking the little hand that rested on the pommel of the saddle.

Ethel withrew it quickly from his grasp, and he resumed:

"It was your beautiful face and frank, loving sympathy, Ethel, that attracted her to you, as they did me the first time we met; and sometimes, when you come to see us in New York, I hope we

will be able to repay you in some measure for your kindness and devotion to her."

The words of praise were soothing to her troubled spirit, but a dull, heavy weight seemed to fall upon her heart at his last remark. She was silent from perfect unability to utter a word, and as they passed from the wood to the open road, the grave, weary look which had settled on her face startled Graham; leaning forward, he said anxiously:

"What is the matter, Ethel? are you ill?"

She was spared the necessity of replying by the arrival of Tom, who galloped up, exclaiming:

"The rest of the party reached home long ago, Ethel, and Aunt Marion, fearing that something had happened to Graham for riding that black demon of Kingsland's, dispatched me forthwith to hunt you up. I perceive, however, that you are quite capable of taking care of yourselves, so I'll ride on ahead, and inform my anxious auntie that you will be home just as soon as yonder moon disappears beyond the distant horizon, for it has evidently bewitched you both."

Ethel, who dreaded being left alone any longer with Graham, looked at Tom so imploringly to remain, that he, seeing something was amiss, good-naturedly reined up his horse, and kept up a one-sided conversation with Graham, who was rather monosyllabic in his replies, until they reached the Hall.

She was glad when bed time came, and she

could retire to the quiet of her own room. As she took off her watch, the little golden ball Graham had fastened to the chain during the summer met her eye, and with a passionate sense of misery, she broke it forcibly from the slender chain which attached it to her watch-guard, threw it into a box in her drawer, and burst into tears. An insupportable weight of grief seemed to crush her very soul, and she shivered as with an ague, as the future rose before her, seemingly a barren, dreary waste, with nothing to cheer the solitude and utter loneliness of the life to which she looked forward. Throwing a shawl around her shoulders, she sat down by the window, and drawing aside the curtains, gazed long and sorrowfully into the still night. Scalding tears rushed to her eyes and fell unheeded upon the little white hands clasped convulsively upon the window-sill.

There is no position so false or embarrassing for a woman to be placed in, as to feel that the love which she secretly entertains for a man, is reciprocated by him, although no word of love had ever passed his lips for her. She would be blind indeed, to be unconscious of his earnest gaze, as his eye follows her every movement, or not to notice the silent though unmistakable signs which love employs as indicated in looks and actions All of these she must feign not to see, and only accept the homage as far as words express it. Women possess a keener insight, a finer intuitive perception of the *hidden* workings of the heart than men.

A man may be withheld from expressing the love which he feels, by the *seeming* indifference and almost absolute coldness with which his attentions are received; while all the time, there may be welling up, deep, warm, and pure, a love unbounded in that woman's heart, which she must quietly cover up, lest the cold, unsympathizing eye of the world see her hidden treasure, and scornfully laugh at her lack of womanly reserve in showing it. He to whom she may have given her heart, with all its wealth of love, may perchance lay his own indifferent affections at the feet of another, because of a half-cowardly uncertainty lest his love might not be returned. Sad indeed is the fate of such a woman, though there might be to some such wounded heart a cold consolation in the thought that he who could not stand the hazard of a die in such a cause would scarcely be worthy of her life or love.

Ethel felt humbled to the very dust, as she thought that Graham surmising the truth, had become aware of her affection for him, and had taken this opportunity of announcing his engagement to Daisy. Her mind was tormented with doubt and fear; the moonlight streamed in through the open window, bathing the white figure of the weeping girl in its silvery beams, but she heeded not its gentle sympathy, and surrendered herself to a perfect abandonment of sorrow, despair, and bitter mortification.

A sound of a blind thrown back startled her,

and raising her eyes toward the south tower, which was occupied by the gentlemen, she saw a man's form standing by one of the windows, regarding her intently. The distance was too great for her to distinguish who it was, but hastily drawing together the curtains, she withdrew from the window, and sought refuge in sleep. Her exhausted nature soon yielded to its quieting influence, and her weary eyelids closed in gentle slumber.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FISHING PARTY.

THE entire household was astir early the next morning, and every one was on the *qui vive*, preparing for the fishing excursion. Bait, flies, fishing-rods, and all the paraphernalia of a fisherman's outfit were stowed away in the open wagon appropriated to their use, as well as the large hampers containing crockery, and provisions for the lunch. Tom was ubiquitous, and consequently in his element. He flew from the stable to the house, from the dining-room to the kitchen, giving an order to one, a lecture to another, and seeming, like an *ignis fatuus*, to be everywhere in general and nowhere in particular. Finally, by his energy and perseverance, he succeeded in getting the entire party of ten off immediately after the early breakfast at six o'clock.

The fresh morning air had an exhilarating effect upon every one, and merry shouts of laughter echoed from one carriage to the other, as they drove past verdant fields and rich meadow-lands, bordered by cool, damp woods, redolent with the

fresh, crisp odor of evergreens, and sparkling with dew-drops. Even Ethel's languid spirits were refreshed by the bracing morning air, and no one dreamed that an aching, wounded heart throbbed beneath her cheerful exterior. Her beautiful countenance exhibited no trace of the grief and agony which had tortured her brain the previous night. Tom had arranged a seat for her in the carriage with Graham, but she quietly entered the one in which her mother and Daisy were sitting with Temple, while the rest of the party drove on in advance with Mr. Tremount. After two hours driving, they arrived at the little pier on Lake George, to which the *Horicon* was moored. The ladies stepped on board, the lunch hampers were deposited in the tiny cabin, and the gentlemen followed with their fishing-rods and baskets; the moorings were loosed, and the graceful little yacht started on her voyage up the lake.

Hardly a ripple disturbed the glassy surface of the waters, while far down in their surpassingly clear depths every stone and pebble could distinctly be seen. The little fish swam by, serenely conscious of their safety, their shining coats glistening in the sunlight, which lit the very bed of the lake with a golden light.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed Bessie, "there is a trout close to us; *do* get your pole and catch it."

"Why, you silly little goosey, that is nothing but a stick," replied Tom, looking down to where she pointed. "It looks as if it were swimming,

because the water is running in a contrary direction."

"Just as if I didn't know a stick from a trout! It *is* one, and I must have it."

"Well, if you say it is a fish, of course it must be so; but it is a mighty *sticky* specimen of the finny tribe."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to make such an execrable pun. Don't you know that punning is the worst possible kind of wit?"

"Indeed! I merely made the remark because I thought you could appreciate it."

"Then you ought to be *pun*ished for thinking such things."

"Your *puny* attempt at a scold deserves to be commended, little cousin," said Tom, lifting her jockey hat from her forehead, and peering into her eyes with a saucy smile.

"Really, Tom, your *pun*gency is quite overwhelming," returned Bessie, laughing.

"And so is yours, Bessie Bunch. But we may as well drop this nonsense, for I perceive that Miss Preston's *pun*ctilious notions of propriety are shocked at our frivolity. She will hardly be able to survive the trip if we continue this edifying conversation much longer; will you, Miss Preston?" he added, addressing the young lady, who was lazily turning over the contents of a pocket-book belonging to Ashton, who sat beside her.

"What did you observe?" she answered, languidly raising her eyes, and regarding him coolly.

"I believe I made some wise remark upon the weather; did I not, Bess?"

"You had better employ a stenographer to write down your brilliant remarks on the spot, and then you would not forget them so conveniently," interposed Miss Preston, rallying her energies, as she foresaw a conflict impending with the enemy.

"Excellent advice, but it would hardly be necessary for me to follow it, as I understand shorthand, and can write down my own immortal thoughts for the benefit of posterity. I would, however, seriously advise Ashton to learn the art immediately."

"And why, pray?"

"Would you really like to know my reason?"

"If you choose to tell me."

"Oh, I see you are rather indifferent on the subject, so I won't enlighten you."

"Indeed I should like to know," she replied, leaning forward, her curiosity overcoming pride, coldness, and resentment at one moment.

"And you will not be vexed if I tell you?"

"No, of course not," she replied impatiently.

"I am afraid you will," said he, enjoying the tantalizing suspense in which he kept her.

"I said I would not; is not my word sufficient?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply for an instant. Then stooping forward, he said in a low tone, which no one but Ashton and Miss Preston could hear:

"It would be a good thing if all the 'flat, stale, and unprofitable' remarks to which you give utterance occasionally for my benefit, could descend to posterity, for although I do not particularly appreciate them, yet some poor soul in futurity may. Ashton can immortalize himself, as well as you, by writing them down on the spot, with appropriate illustrations of the interesting scenes to which they refer, or 'by our special artist' in big letters in one corner of each illustrated page. I will draw the design if you prefer, however."

"See here, Clayton, I'd like to know if you mean to insult Miss Preston?" exclaimed Ashton, angrily rising from his seat.

"Not at all, not at all," said Tom, with provoking coolness. "Resume your chair, my dear fellow. I only obeyed my instincts of gallantry and did what I was told. But the atmosphere is getting too warm in this quarter of the deck to suit my northern nature. Ethel, what are you thinking about?" he asked, sitting down by his cousin.

"Her thoughts have been wandering in dreamland for some time," replied Graham, who had been watching her unperceived while the others were talking.

"One would think," he added, turning toward her, "from the earnestness with which you have been gazing down yonder to the homes of the nymphs and naiads, that you longed to take up your abode with them."

"Would that I could!" she cried impetuously.

"Why do you say so," he asked, in a low, pained voice.

His words, and still more his tender, anxious manner, were unendurable; and he was little aware of the pain he inflicted by the concern and interest expressed in his looks and tone. Ethel's face flushed deeply under his scathing gaze, and she turned away abruptly and made no reply.

Graham felt hurt, and rising hastily, walked over to Daisy, who was chatting pleasantly with George Temple and Mrs. Tremount.

The *Horicon* soon made for one of the beautiful little islands which dot Lake George, and gliding into a charming little inlet, was anchored near the shore. The *ship's yawl*, as Tom had dubbed the little row-boat, was lowered, and after the prescribed amount of screaming, some real and more pretended, the ladies were assisted into it, and Tom and Graham rowed them ashore. The other gentlemen followed on the return of the boat, with lunch-baskets, bait, and fishing-rods, and the sport commenced in earnest.

Ashton, who disliked fishing about as cordially as he did anything else which required any exertion, had succeeded in inducing Miss Preston to accompany him to a shady spot on a slight eminence near by, where the flirtation on the knoll was resumed with more desperation than ever. Afterwards, on the voyage home, Ethel's observing eye, which seldom missed what was going on, noticed the glitter of the diamond ring on Miss

Preston's finger, the result of Ashton's successful suit and her artful manœuvring.

"Mr. Temple, won't you *please* put this horrid little reptile on my hook for me?" cried Ethel, in the most appealing tones, holding out a little wriggling worm between her thumb and forefinger.

"Put it on yourself," interposed Tom, as he hauled in a shining captive and deposited it in the basket.

"Indeed I can't," she replied, gazing with disgust and repugnance at her little squirming victim.

"Well, then, my dear, you must wait a few minutes; Temple is too busy to attend to you now. Just see what a splendid lot of fish he and uncle Ralph have caught, while you girls have kept Graham and me fussing and fiddling with your hooks and bait."

"But, Tom, don't you know that it is extremely harrowing to one's feelings to stick a hook into a little live, odious thing like this? If you don't take it, I shall throw it away."

"Then give it to me; we can't afford to throw our bait away in that style. Ethel, you really ought to overcome such absurd squeamishness."

"Oh, Tom, for mercy's sake come and help me," shrieked Bessie, throwing down her rod, and rushing toward him.

"What under the sun is the matter?"

"The frightful thing is in my hair," she screamed, clutching her hair frantically.

"Heigho, you are in a fix, you poor little mor-

tal; but keep still," he exclaimed, catching her in his arms and holding her fast as he released the struggling fish from the golden net into which she had flung him by a graceful swing of her fishing-line.

"There!" said he, throwing the object of her fright back into its element, "what possessed you to catch a trout in this curly wig of yours?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered half-crying. "I only wanted to see how my fish would look sailing through the air on the end of my line, and the hideous object landed right on the top of my head."

"I advise you not to try the experiment again, you frightened little fisherwoman. Just sit here on this shaded rock, until I come back. I must go and help Temple and Uncle Ralph carry the lunch-baskets over there among the trees, where Aunt Marion is spreading the table-cloth."

"Cecil, it makes me sick to fish. I can't bear to see those poor little things struggling so miserably in the basket. Need I fish any more?" said Daisy, lifting her troubled blue eyes to Graham's face.

"Why, no, my child," he replied, smiling tenderly on her. "Had I known you disliked it so much, I should not have allowed you to fish at all. You had better go over there and assist Mrs. Tremount with the lunch. Miss Ethel and I will put up the fishing tackle and follow you presently."

Ethel, who had no disposition to be left alone

with him, turned to accompany her; but Graham, placing his hand on her arm, said quietly:

"Don't go yet; I must speak with you a few minutes. Why do you avoid me so much? Have I done anything to incur your displeasure?"

"Do not detain me, Mr. Graham. I must go and help mamma prepare our lunch."

"Bessie and Daisy are assisting her, and she does not need you," he said pleadingly.

"Pardon me, but I think she does."

"One word, then, before you go. Are you engaged to George Temple?"

"Engaged to Mr. Temple!" repeated Ethel, completely taken by surprise. Recovering herself, she said with flashing eyes:

"Really, Mr. Graham, I cannot conceive what possible reason or right you can have for asking such a question."

"Miss Tremount, Temple has paid you attentions of late which you cannot misunderstand."

"And if he has, what right have you to question them?" she demanded, indignantly.

"Simply that of a friend," he replied, calmly, though his face flushed. "If you do not reciprocate his affection, you are trifling with the feelings of a kind-hearted, honorable man. Ethel, he loves you with a devotion you are little aware of."

"You have enlightened me not a little in regard to his attachment for me, which I can truly say I never was conscious of before," she answered, haughtily. "You plead your friend's cause well,

but you are entirely mistaken if you think his attentions mean anything more than those of mere friendship. Mr. Temple and I are excellent friends, and I hope will also remain so ;" and bowing coldly, she left him to his own uncomfortable reflections, and walked over toward the group under the trees.

Miss Preston and Ashton condescended to leave their quiet retreat on the rock at the summons to lunch. This Tom vociferously announced by blowing an immense tin horn, awakening the echoes of the woods and lake, and calling down upon himself and his clamorous instrument the anathemas of the ladies, who put their hands to their ears to shut out the horrible din. Soft words and tender glances could not appease the increasing appetites of the romantic couple, and they were very glad to descend to the sublunary scenes of earth, and partake of a substantial repast. Boned turkey, cold chicken, sandwiches, cake, and coffee disappeared mysteriously under the appreciative efforts of all members of the hungry party.

"Come, Marion, we must hurry these young people a little," said Mr. Tremount, consulting his watch after the lunch was disposed of. "It is nearly three o'clock, and we must set sail for home at half-past."

"Tom, dear, won't you and some of the gentlemen get us some water to wash these dishes, while we girls clear the table off?" said Ethel, rolling up her sleeves and preparing for work.

"With all my heart, cousin mine. But what shall we get it in?"

"Here! take this lemonade pail," cried Bessie, tossing it to him. "And please, Mr. Ashton, fill this coffee-biggin for us too."

"Any commands for me?" said Temple, laughing, as he caught the merry twinkle in Bessie's eye. The young lady cast a mischievous side-glance at Miss Preston, who looked the picture of disgust and annoyance, as she watched her long and slender lover striding off among the trees, with the shining coffee-urn dangling in his hand.

"You can shake the crumbs off the table-cloth and fold it up, if you *must* do something. But goodness! that isn't the way to do it!" she said, as he rolled it up in true masculine fashion, and threw it without much ceremony into one of the baskets.

"If you ever intend to get married, you will have to learn a good many lessons in housekeeping, for it never would do in this world for you to tumble things up in a wudge like this," she remarked, solemnly, as she unrolled the crumpled table-cloth, and gave him two corners to hold while she folded it up neatly.

"Judging from the housekeeping experience of my progenitors, it is to be presumed that it will not fall to my lot to dust parlors or attend to table linen."

"Oh, but you may, notwithstanding all your fine notions. Some bright day you may come

home and find that Bridget and her satellites have left you in the lurch, and *then* what will you do?"

"Well, I might possibly light the fire, put the kettle on, and maybe assist my fair Algenina wipe the forks and plates; but as for anything else, I beg to be excused. It would be exhibiting far too much of the *spirit of '76* if I were to wash the saucers and cups, and sweep the stairs down, to agree with my preconceived ideas of housekeeping."

"Wash the saucers and cups? Just as if housekeeping consisted solely in an eternal washing of dishes and sweeping!" said Bessie, disdainfully.

"Won't you enlighten my ignorance, and teach me the mysteries of the art?"

"Excuse me from undertaking such a task. You wouldn't be a very apt pupil, I'm afraid, so you had better go and ask Ethel; she would probably have more patience with you than I," said Bessie wickedly.

Temple laughed, but looked annoyed, while Bessie smiled, as she saw her shaft had struck the mark. Still bent upon mischief, she turned toward Miss Preston, and said innocently, while she rubbed away vigorously at the platter she had in her hand:

"Loo, there is Guy Ashton coming through the trees. See, he can hardly stagger under the weight of that huge coffee-urn full of water. Why don't you go and help him?"

"I fancy you have been taking lessons of Mr.

Clayton lately, have you not?" replied the young lady, coolly.

"Taking lessons of Tom! Pray what can *he* teach me that I don't know already?" said Bessie, opening her blue eyes wide with astonishment.

"He can teach you not to say saucy things about people when they are not present to speak for themselves," answered her cousin, coming up softly behind her and kissing her cheek.

"I'm ashamed of you, Tom," she said, shaking her dish-towel at him threateningly.

"Then you had better recover your equanimity as soon as possible, for we will have to start for home in five minutes."

The dishes were speedily disposed of, shawls, baskets, and parasols picked up, and all started for the shore. The little row-boat carried them to the yacht, the anchors were weighed, sails unfurled, and a soft south breeze wafted the *Horicon* swiftly on her voyage homeward.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STORM.

A LOW, distant, rumbling sound startled Graham, who stood at the helm, from the painful thoughts in which he had been indulging. Turning toward Mr. Tremount, he said in a low tone :

" Do you see those copper-colored clouds in the north ? "

" Yes."

" Well, sir, they are brewing a storm ; the breeze has already freshened, and I fear it will be upon us before we reach Ticonderoga. Had we not better steer for the lee of yonder island, for the storm is coming up rapidly ? "

" Yes ; for if we run in toward shore now, and wait for the storm, we will not get home till midnight. Tom, come here ! " he shouted to his nephew. " Tell Ashton we need his services, and you and Temple follow Graham's directions, while I speak to the ladies."

They, however, had already retired to the cabin, and the deck was cleared of everything. The staunch little vessel sped quickly on her way ; the fierce moaning of the wind as it circled in eddies

around her, and the splashing of the big rain-drops on the deck, warned Graham that the storm was near. Steering under the lee of the shore, the *Horicon* was anchored, the sails furled, and everything made ready for the coming blast. The fury of the tempest was soon upon them; the turbid waters of the lake rose in curling billows, and dashed with angry violence against the frail craft, which quivered in every timber as she rocked and tossed on their foaming crests. The forked lightning flashed fearfully through the inky, rolling clouds, and heaven's artillery belched forth its thunders, shaking the hills and rattling among the distant mountains, which echoed its reverberating roar as it leaped from rock to rock. Peal after peal of thunder resounded through the skies, while the blinding sheets of rain and darkness of approaching night, mingled with the howling of the storm, struck terror to the hearts of all on board the devoted vessel.

Silence and fearful foreboding reigned in the little cabin. Graham's strong arm encircled Daisy's fainting form, and her white, still face rested in utter unconsciousness on his breast. Miss Preston clung in affright to Ashton, who for once exhibited some signs of manliness in his efforts to soothe the terror-stricken girl, as the deafening roar of thunder shook the heaven; while Bessie, pale and trembling, hung heavily on her father's arm. Ethel and her mother alone among the ladies appeared to preserve their coolness and self-pos-

session. The quiet, trustful expression on Ethel's marble face showed that mere animal bravery did not sustain her in that awful hour, and the pure, seraphic smile on her mother's sweet countenance beamed with a holy confidence in Him "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand," whose "way is in the sea," and whose "path is in the great waters."

For two dreadful hours the thunder-gusts swept by, threatening every moment to engulf the little vessel, as she trembled in the grasp of the billows. Then the wind sank to rest, and only the distant mutterings of the thunder could be heard. The rain ceased, and the spirit of the storm passed on his way up the lake. The black clouds in the north rolled away, and the crimson glow of sunset tinged the tree-tops and purple hills bordering the dancing and still troubled waters with its splendor. A brilliant double rainbow of surpassing beauty spanned heaven's blue vault, and the feathery, golden clouds chased each other in their shining path toward the west, till all the glowing colors of the sky were lost in night.

The fresh evening wind filled the sails of the *Horicon*, and soon the bright lights of Ticonderoga came in sight, guiding the noble little bark to her port, and the tired, thankful party were safely landed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PARTING.

THE following afternoon was fixed for the departure of the gentlemen for New York, and Graham sought, though unavailing, every opportunity to speak alone with Ethel. She managed to avoid him most dexterously, notwithstanding Tom's strategic movements in his behalf. Miss Preston's engagement to Guy Ashton had been announced, to the evident astonishment of Mr. and Mrs. Tremount, though, as Bessie eagerly suggested, "what else could be expected after the desperate flirtation on the knoll, the moonlight rides in the woods, and the *tête-à-tête* on the rocks the day previous."

After the adieux were over, Graham kissed Daisy's sweet face, and turning towards Ethel, looked down upon her with his soul shining in his eyes, which beamed with the passionate, all-absorbing love he cared no longer to conceal. Then Ethel saw for the first time that she alone possessed the supreme love of that strong man's heart. The revelation was overwhelming; her eyelids drooped and quivered beneath his burning

gaze, and her lips refused to utter a word of farewell. "What does he mean? Is he false to Daisy? Does he love me?" were thoughts that passed like an electric shock through her brain, and almost stopped the beating of her heart. Crushing her hand in his, Graham felt a slight pressure from hers as she withdrew it and left something in his palm. Looking down, he saw *Fidelitas*, the little golden watch-charm he had given her. Hurt and mortified, he held it in his hand an instant, then looking at her with an expression of mingled *hauteur* and reproach, he thrust it into his pocket, and bowing stiffly, turned to go down the steps.

"By Jove! if I haven't forgotten my cigar-case!" exclaimed Tom, springing out of the carriage; "I'll be with you in an instant; I left the case somewhere in the library."

Graham hesitated, and then stepped back to the pillar near which Ethel was standing, her figure quite concealed from the others by the thick wistaria vine which encircled the pillar and drooped gracefully over her head.

Taking her hand in both of his, he said in tones of thrilling earnestness:

"Ethel, darling—you must let me call you so just once, whatever happens—should we never meet again, remember I have always loved you, and you alone."

A perfect storm of emotion swept over her, and she leaned against the pillar for support.

Graham still retained her hand, and raising it reverentially to his lips, he said sadly:

"Oh! Ethel, can you not say one word to me before I go? this *may* be our last parting on earth."

There was a solemnity in his voice and manner, that made her tremble with a sense of some dread presentiment. She struggled to speak, but the words died in her throat. The astonished look in her dark eyes, as she raised them bright and radiant to his face, however, told him all. The brilliant flash in his own eyes as he caught their meaning was overpowering in its intensity; and the sweet, flushed face drooped lower and lower, till it rested on his breast. Ethel's heart had found its resting-place. At that instant, Tom hurried out on the piazza, saying:

"Come, Graham, we must be off, or we shall lose that 3.50 train!"

Bending down, Graham softly imprinted a kiss on her quivering lips, and whispered:

"Faithful unto death, my darling."

Springing off the piazza, he took his seat beside Tom in the carriage, and drove off. As they turned the curve of the road which would soon hide them from sight, Graham looked back and saw Ethel standing out from the pillar, with arms outstretched as if longing to call him back. That last imploring gesture lingered in his memory like a shining light, and brightened many an hour before the day dawned and the shadows passed away.

Miss Preston returned home some weeks after Maud's wedding, to renovate and replenish her wardrobe before repairing to the sea-shore. *There* she was in her element, and indulged in her favorite pastime of flirting with an enchanting *abandon* and charming disregard of anybody's opinion but her own; entangling the hearts and turning the heads of silly youths and fast young men, who sported their showy teams at Newport—excellent specimens of that class of the *genus homo*, who are possessed of ample fortunes but a most lamentable deficiency of craniological development. Ashton paid weekly visits to that fashionable resort, and was quite as regardless of the gossipping tongue of Mrs. Grundy and her numerous relatives, male and female, as his fair *fiancée*. He flirted with giddy girls and weak and more foolish matrons, until his enviable reputation as the fastest, naughtiest, and most delightfully wicked young man at the shore was fully established.

The summer months passed quickly, and fall came with its school duties for Bessie and Daisy. The latter had passed the summer travelling with the Tremounts, and returned with Bessie to Madame de Lainy's school, which opened in September. Miss Preston, who had given up the happy, pleasant days of school-girl life, began the preparations of her elaborate *trousseau* for her grand wedding in January.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UNEXPECTED VISIT.

ETHEL was sitting alone by the library window one dark afternoon in November. A violent storm of sleet and snow was raging without, and the wind moaned drearily through the elms and cedars as they rocked and swayed in the blast. An unaccountable feeling of oppression stole over her, and she shivered with a half-sickening apprehension of some coming evil which seemed to weigh heavily upon her spirits.

"Oh dear, how I wish Tom were here!" she exclaimed, as her mother entered the room.

"And here he is," said that young man, striding in and saluting aunt and cousin in his usual demonstrative fashion. "Speak of angels and you hear the—trampling of their boots."

"What a perversion; but you are the most convenient, dear old fellow in the world," said Ethel laughing, as he drew her to the sofa. "What happy thought possessed you to come up here just when I needed you, to exorcise the evil spirits of the storm?"

"A fit of the blues, eh! Well, that's something

new for you. I had a letter from Kingsland yesterday, requesting me to attend to some business of his at Millford. I arrived early this afternoon, but thought I would dispense with business before coming to the hall. I shall have to return to the city to-morrow, as I am minus clean shirt, collar, and tooth-brush."

"Well, I am glad of even this angelic interruption. How are Bess and Daisy?"

"Bessie is well, but Daisy had a hemorrhage of the lungs last week, and has been very ill. Graham is going to take her South this week, and leave her with his aunt at Aiken for the winter. He feels quite concerned about her."

"Has Loo called often?"

"Yes, she has been there several times, but I usually contrive to make myself scarce when she makes her appearance. I never *did* love her very enthusiastically, and now I have less respect for her than ever. One can excuse Ashton's little foibles, because he is a man—"

"Indeed! well, if that is not a truly masculine reason to give. Really, Tom, I cannot conceive why a man should be justified in his follies any more than a woman."

"I do not wish you to understand that I would sustain a man in wrong-doing, but there are some things one can excuse in him which are utterly unpardonable in a woman. I have such a high regard for your sex, little cousin, that I cannot endure to see such bold, fast, unwomanly women of

Miss Preston's stamp. I reckon Ashton will find he has caught a Tartar when he marries that girl."

"Are you to be one of the groomsmen?"

"Not I, indeed. Ashton asked me to be his first man, but his amiable betrothed declared that she would not be married at all if I accepted, which I have a notion to do in order to save him from the blissful fate awaiting him."

"I don't wonder in the least at her hating you."

"Neither do I, my dear. The only wonder is we have not murdered each other before this. We seem to possess the unhappy faculty of exasperating each other to an unlimited degree, and I sometimes doubt my own sanity after my conflicts with her."

"What other gentlemen are to stand up with him?"

"I haven't heard. Graham declined the honor on Daisy's account, and Temple went to Kansas with a fit of the blues two months ago. I fancy *you* are accountable for that gentleman's present melancholy state of mind."

"I! What do you mean?"

"Now you need not look so innocent, and pretend you don't know, for you *do*."

"That is emphatic, if it isn't polite."

"It is the truth nevertheless. Come, Ethel, tell your old cousin all about it; I won't tell a soul."

"Well, Tom, Mr. Temple is a very agreeable gentleman, but he *is* so absurdly soft and sentimen-

tal, that he must needs fall in love with every girl he meets. Maud reigned supreme in his affections for some time, and I presume he has been in love at least a dozen times since."

"You're hard on the poor fellow, Ethel; can't a man admire you girls without being forever made fun of for his pains?"

"He can, if he don't carry his devotions so far that they become tiresome."

"Who ever heard of a woman becoming tired of attentions and admiration?" said Tom in amazement.

"Well, there is such a possibility, even if you don't believe it. We become satiated with French candies and *bonbons* if we have them every day."

"Ethel, you are an anomaly among womankind," said Tom solemnly. "But even if you become wearied with our continual devotions, that is no reason why you should laugh and make fun of us behind our backs. You listen for five minutes to the conversation of half a dozen girls in a room together, and I am willing to bet you any amount that they would talk and gossip about their beaux all the time. They'd adore the love of a mustache that this one has, go into raptures about the curling locks and melancholy, soul-lit eyes of that one, laugh at the big feet and sprawly hands of another, somebody's sentimental drawl, and somebody else's bewitchingly wicked eyes, and so on to the end of the chapter."

"We don't have such interesting specimens call

at our house," replied Ethel dryly. "You gentlemen think that we girls cannot talk about anything but dress, fashion, balls, and beaux, and all that sort of nonsense. When we haven't anything else to do, possibly we may, once in a while, indulge in a little discussion about your various merits, and demerits, but I beg leave to inform you that you may as well divest yourselves of the erroneous idea that *gentlemen* are the principal topic of conversation among ladies; you flatter yourselves immensely, and are decidedly mistaken."

"But what of Temple?" said Tom, wisely changing the subject.

"Why, I thought we had dropped *him* long ago?"

"There! that't just the way you talk: take a fellow up, and then drop him like a hot penny on the sidewalk. But seriously, Ethel, he did like you tremendously; he may have admired Maud, but you made the most lasting impression on his susceptible heart, and I think he felt your cool refusal of him keenly last summer."

"Indeed I never refused him at all, for I did not give him an opportunity to offer himself. He went into the heroics once last summer, and after some ineffectual interruptions or my part, I finally excused myself on the plea of being fatigued, and left him."

"That was cool."

"What else could I do? It is preposterous for a man to think that just because a young lady seems

pleased with his society, and treats him pleasantly, that she must necessarily be in love with him. You cannot treat a gentleman with any degree of consideration nowadays, without his thinking you are distractedly in love with him, conceited creatures! And *vice versa* too, I am ashamed to confess, for the girls are equally silly. It is simply ridiculous for people to think that a gentleman and lady cannot be friends in a sort of Platonic way, without forever falling in love with each other. For my part, I will not believe a man loves me until he tells me so."

"There you do not understand human nature, or you would know that love expresses itself in looks and manners or actions quite as often as it does in words. 'All hearts in love use their own language, and every eye negotiates for itself.'"

"I know that very well."

"I thought you did," said her cousin dryly. "You had a touching illustration of it last summer when Graham bade you good-by on the piazza."

The blood mantled Ethel's cheeks and brow, and her distress and mortification at having her secret known were so painfully evident, that Tom pitied her confusion, and patting her crimson cheek, said kindly:

"Never mind, little cousin; no one saw it but I, and really, Ethel, I could not help looking for one brief instant, you looked so confoundedly romantic —quite *à la* Huguenot Lovers in attitude.

Ethel quickly recovered from her embarrassment,

and looking at him said, archly: "What! Listen to what one woman says of love:

"'Love is a pearl of purest hue,
But stormy waves are round it;
And dearly may the woman rue
The hour that first she found it.'"

"It is to be hoped that you will never have occasion to regret having found the rare one now in your own possession," said Tom, smiling kindly.

Both were silent for a little while. Ethel sat in a low chair, with her hands clasped on her knees, a sad, half-wistful smile resting on her pure, sweet face as she gazed dreamily into the blazing wood-fire. Tom watched her for some time, and then turning to his aunt, said softly:

"Does not Ethel remind you of that pretty picture of Evangeline to-night, as she sits there with her hands clasped in her lap?"

"What did you say?" inquired Ethel looking round suddenly.

"I was merely telling Aunt Marion that I thought you looked like Evangeline, with that expression of resignation on your face," said Tom.

"How absurd! I am sure there is no dear departed Gabriel for whom I am mourning."

CHAPTER XXV.

CLOUDS.

"WHO can be coming here on such a stormy night!" exclaimed Ethel, as the violent ringing of the door-bell startled her.

Walking into the hall, Tom met the butler, who handed him a telegram.

"Some business message from Graham, I presume," he remarked, as he tore off the yellow envelope.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Ethel, as her cousin turned ghastly white and staggered toward the library door.

"Uncle Ralph, come here," he said, hoarsely, pushing Ethel from him, and stepping toward his uncle.

"Tom, you *must* tell me," she cried, clinging to his arm, as an undefined terror came over her.

Putting his arm tightly around her, he said tremblingly:

"I have bad news for you—for us all."

"Is it Bessie—Daisy—? O Tom, is it—is it Mr. Graham?" she said wildly.

"The telegram is from Bessie. I will read it. Ethel, can you bear it?"

"For God's sake tell me! I cannot endure this suspense."

With white, trembling lips, he read:

"*Tell Ethel to come to Aunt Moseley's immediately. Daisy is very low. Cecil Graham died this morning.*"

The blood curdled in Ethel's veins; a gray, stony look crept over her face and seemed to freeze on it. Her pulses stood still, her limbs refused their support, and a happy unconsciousness followed.

"My poor, poor child!" said Mr. Tremount, lifting her tenderly to the sofa. "I did not know that she loved him."

Tom, strong man though he was, wept like a child as he gazed pityingly upon the beautiful, death-like face, forgetting his own loss in the terrible blow which had fallen so suddenly upon his cousin. All that long and sleepless night Mrs. Tremount sat by her daughter's bedside, watching with weeping eyes the white, set face which rested so strangely still against the pillow. Not one tear did Ethel shed, but her dark eyes glittered with unnatural brilliancy, and the drawn, tense lines around her mouth evinced the soul agony she was enduring.

Early the following morning, Tom accompanied her to New York. No word of complaint escaped her lips, and the soft, grateful look which beamed in her eyes, as they mutely thanked him for his tender sympathy, chilled him to the heart. Wrapping

a warm shawl softly around her, he made her rest her head upon his shoulder. The tired eyelids drooped till the long, black lashes swept her cheeks, and Ethel's wounded spirit found refuge in sleep.

Upon their arrival at Mrs. Moseley's late in the afternoon, Bessie met them at the door, and throwing her arms around Ethel's neck, burst into a violent flood of tears. Quietly disengaging herself, she kissed her sister tenderly, and walked upstairs. After resting a while she called for Tom. As he entered the room, she arose from the sofa, saying, with a touching pathos in her voice:

"Tom, where—where is he! I want to see him."

"Not to-night, dear cousin, but to-morrow you shall," he replied, gently detaining her.

"Oh, *please* let me! I must see him," she cried, looking up beseechingly to his kind face.

"Ethel, why don't you cry; you must, or this grief will kill you," said Tom impulsively.

"I cannot; I don't feel as if I could ever weep again," she answered quietly, without even a quiver of her lips. "Which room is he in?"

Seeing remonstrance was useless, Tom led her down the long hall, and stopped at a door at the farther extremity. Softly turning the key, they entered the chamber of death. Walking steadily towards the bed, Ethel gazed with dry, burning eyes on the noble form of Cecil Graham. A holy calm rested on the handsome face, which looked as if chiselled from polished marble.

"A smile so fixed, so holy, on the brow,
Death gazed, and left it there;
He dared not steal that signet-ring of heaven."

"Please leave me for a little while," she said calmly. "I want to be alone with him just once more."

Tom left the room, and she knelt on the floor beside the bed. Tenderly raising the clustering curls from the broad brow, she saw the black spot where he had received his death-blow. With a wailing cry, she bowed her head and pressed a long kiss on the white forehead, then crouched on the floor, her frame racked with tearless sobs. The bleak winter wind crept piercingly in through the open windows, rattling the shutters and chilling her to the bone. Looking again at the still, cold form before her, a sickening sense of pain and desolation swept over her, a cold trembling seized her, and she moaned in the anguish of her soul. How long she knelt there she never knew. When Tom re-entered the room, he found her with her face pressed close to that of the dead man, oblivious of all else.

"Oh, Tom, why did he die and leave me, when I loved him so!" she cried, as he led her from the room.

"I wish I could comfort you," said her cousin, gently smoothing her hot brow.

"If he only knew how I loved him! Oh, why can't I die too," she sobbed despairingly.

"Hush! don't talk so. We want you to live for us now. Daisy needs you too."

"Daisy! I hate her. She killed *him*," exclaimed Ethel fiercely.

"He died in saving her life; he would have done the same for you."

"O God! forgive me for my selfishness. Take me away. Where is Daisy? I must see her."

"She is sleeping now, but Bessie will call you when she awakes. Come to your room now, and rest."

"Tell me how it all happened, please. Auntie tried to tell me, but my head was so confused, I could not understand her."

Sitting beside her on the sofa, Tom gently told her of the accident which caused Graham's death. He told how, on the previous morning, Graham had started with Daisy for his aunt's home in Aiken, South Carolina, where she was to pass the winter. A heavy mist hung over the river as they crossed the Jersey City ferry at Desbrosses Street. The fog whistles blew, bells were rung, and the little black tugs which crowd the bay and river shrieked as if the very demon of evil possessed them as they shot by the ferry-boat. Just before reaching Jersey City side, a dull, crashing thud startled the passengers. A large schooner struck the boat amidships, ripping open her sides, and crushed through the ladies' cabin into the very centre of the boat.

The schooner swung round, and row-boats were

quickly lowered to save the passengers from the doomed vessel. All was horror and confusion on board. Her engines ceased to work, the boat careened to one side, and shrieks of agony rent the air, as the bleeding, mangled forms of those who were injured by the collision were thrown into the water. Many of the passengers were unhurt, among whom were Daisy and Graham. The nerve and presence of mind of the latter were instrumental in saving many ; strong men and weak, timid women looked to him in that awful hour, as if his arm alone could save them. His clear, commanding voice could be heard far above the din and confusion that prevailed, giving directions, and quieting the terror-stricken mass of human beings who were huddled on one side of the rapidly sinking boat.

One after another was lowered into the small boats sent to the shore. As Daisy's turn came, Graham took her in his arms and whispered some low, earnest words in her ear. Taking off his watch and chain, he fastened them around her neck ; then firmly releasing himself from the frantic grasp of the girl, he pressed one long kiss on her ashen face, and gently lowered her into the boat.

As it was gliding out from the shadow of the wreck, three men, watching their opportunity, jumped into the already overcrowded row-boat, and in an instant the waters were black with struggling, drowning humanity.

Graham sprang after his young ward and caught her as she was sinking. He swam with her some distance, but she was heavily muffled in furs, and the waters were rough. Unable to support her fainting form, they sank together. As they rose to the surface, Daisy was picked up by some men in a row-boat, and Graham was caught by a grappling-hook as he was sinking for the last time. His head had struck against a floating piece of timber, and he was utterly unconscious.

Crowds of people gathered on the shore, watching the boats as they rowed up to the dock bearing the dead and dying. Mr. Stanley, a business friend of Graham's, who with his wife had been waiting for the return boat, recognized the inanimate forms of his friend and the young girl beside him, as they were carried to the ferry-house. Taking them to the nearest hotel, he had everything done to resuscitate them. Under Mrs. Stanley's care, Daisy soon returned to consciousness; but Graham had received a concussion of the brain, and death followed a few hours later. In his incoherent wanderings he constantly muttered Ethel's name. Sometimes he would fancy that they were together on the sea-shore, and he would talk about the little golden ball, *Fidelitas*.

Ethel's name was the last that passed his lips ere the cold hand of Death sealed them forever.

The terrible shock and exposure which Daisy had sustained brought on another hemorrhage, and all hope was given up by the physicians whom Mr.

Stanley called in to consult. She was conscious of her condition, and insisted upon being taken home to Mrs. Moseley's. The doctors, seeing that she could not live long, and fearing a refusal would hasten her death, consented, and late in the afternoon of the same day, not twelve hours after she had started with Graham full of hope and happiness, she was brought back dying, with the dead form of her guardian following the carriage in which she reclined.

Ethel was very still, very quiet, while Tom was talking, though the nervous, convulsive twitching of the little white hands, clasped tightly together, showed the effort she was making to control the pent-up agony within her breast. When her cousin left the room, with a dizzy, sick, despairing sense of pain and loneliness, she threw herself on her knees by the bed, and wept with passionate abandonment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

A FEW hours later Ethel entered Daisy's room. Stretching forth her hands, Daisy uttered a low, glad cry, and whispered:

"Oh, Ethel, you cannot tell how glad I am to see you. There is something I must tell you quickly, for I have not many hours to live."

"Hush, Daisy, you must not talk so."

"I have no desire to live," she answered, stroking Ethel's cheek, which lay close beside her on the pillow. "Please raise me a little."

Ethel lifted the golden head till it rested on her shoulder, and Daisy resumed feebly:

"I want to correct a mistake Miss Preston made long ago—I never knew about it until lately, before we met with that dreadful accident. Ethel, you thought Cecil loved me?"

"I did think so once, Daisy."

"He loved me only as his sister," she went on, without noticing the significance of Ethel's reply. "But he loved you alone. He never told me so before yesterday, but I suspected it long ago. I —I—am not ashamed to own it now, but *I* loved

him too—more than any one else," she added, a slight flush tinging her cheek.

"Oh, Daisy, Daisy, why are we made to suffer so?" cried Ethel, impulsively.

"Is it possible that *you* loved him?" asked Daisy in astonishment, as the truth dawned upon her.

Ethel did not reply, but buried her face in the pillow, and shivered.

"Poor Ethel!" whispered Daisy, compassionately.

Looking at the tearful, pleading face turned toward her, Ethel controlled herself with an effort, and said calmly:

"Do not distress yourself, Daisy. I loved Cecil, but I do not think he ever knew it until the day we parted last summer. Oh, if I could only go to him now!" she said, in a voice so full of anguish that Daisy shuddered, and clinging to her, she said faintly:

"I knew that he loved you, but I did not know that you returned his love, Ethel. God only can comfort you now. Would to Heaven I could have spared you this awful sorrow!"

Both girls were silent. Daisy was too much exhausted to speak, and sank back in a death-like swoon. Ethel was frightened at the change that came over her face, and giving her a stimulant, waited anxiously until she gave signs of returning animation.

"There is a box under my pillow which Cecil told me to give you," she said, faintly.

Ethel drew it out and opened the cover. On the velvet lining lay Graham's watch and chain, with the golden ball attached.

"Cecil seemed to have some strange presentiment that he should not live," resumed the sick girl, feebly. "And just before lowering me into the boat, he said to me: 'Tell Ethel that I loved her, and give her my watch. I want you to open *Fidelitas*, and put on her finger the ring that is in it. I loved her as my wife, and I think she loved me. Tell her we shall meet again.' He then fastened the chain around my neck and kissed me. Please open the ball: the key is fastened to it."

"Daisy, how could you listen to him, when you loved him so much yourself?"

"I tried to love him only as my brother," she replied, with a sweet smile.

Ethel kissed her softly, and unlocked the ball. Blinding tears rushed to her eyes as the memories of that bright summer evening at Seabright, when he had fastened it to her watch, crowded upon her. Brushing them away, she raised the cover. There lay a superb diamond ring of surpassing brilliancy, flashing and sparkling on its bed of white satin. Removing it, Daisy said solemnly:

"Cecil meant this for your engagement ring. He asked me to put it on your finger. Give me your hand."

Ethel felt as if the voice of the dead man were speaking to her. A ghastly paleness overspread her face, and her breath came short and quick.

The trembling hand which she held to Daisy was as icy cold as that of the dying girl. Slipping the ring on her finger, Daisy pressed it to her lips, and sank fainting on her pillow.

Ethel hastily summoned Bessie, Tom, and her aunt, and all stood in speechless sorrow around the bedside. Daisy lay still for a few minutes, then the blue eyes opened, and a smile, which seemed to have caught the radiance of another world, beamed upon her face. Ethel kneeled beside her, and the dying girl clasped her hands in hers, and held them to her heart. Then the weak fingers relaxed their grasp, the white eyelids closed, and Daisy's pure spirit had winged its flight heavenward.

The quiet form was shrouded for its last resting-place, and carried to the room in which Graham lay still and cold in death.

The bright winter morning which dawned upon the funeral seemed a bitter mockery to Ethel's feelings. An uncontrolled desire to look once more upon the face of her dead lover possessed her heart. Hastily dressing, she quickly crossed the hall and entered the darkened chamber. There lay Daisy and Graham: the one struck down in the very zenith of a splendid manhood, the other in the youth and beauty of girlhood. White crowns and crosses decked the caskets, and lovely flowers encircled the snowy brows and waxen hands of the dreamless slumberers within. Bending over Daisy's sweet face, she kissed her cheek, and a

bright tear-drop fell upon the marble face. Then kneeling beside Graham, a low, passionate wail of anguish broke upon the solemn stillness of the room; her slight frame shook with convulsive sobs, and she leaned with hopeless grief over him.

The door softly opened, and her cousin entered.

"Ethel, darling, you must come away now. Dr. Steadman is here, and the services will begin in a few minutes."

With an agonized look, she gazed for the last time on Graham's beautiful face; then pressing her own to that of the cold, calm dead, she suffered her cousin to lead her from the room.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!"

The solemn words were uttered, the mourners departed, and the long funeral train wound slowly down the street on its way to the distant cemetery.

"Into the Silent Land!
Ah! who shall lead us thither?
Clouds in the evening sky more darkly gather,
And shattered wrecks lie thicker on the strand.
Who leads us with a gentle hand
Thither, O thither,
Into the Silent Land?

"Into the Silent Land!
To you, ye boundless regions
Of all perfection! Tender morning visions
Of beauteous souls! The future's pledge and band!
Who in life's battle firm doth stand
Shall bear hope's tender blossoms
Into the Silent Land.

"O Land! O Land!
For all the broken-hearted,
The mildest herald by our fate allotted
Beckons, and with inverted torch doth stand,
To lead us with a gentle hand
Into the land of the great departed—
Into the Silent Land."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALONE.

THE days passed on, and Ethel returned to Tremount Hall. Winter came and went, and summer drew near. The hours seemed long to the lonely girl, until Bessie came with her bright, cheering presence, and once more the old Hall echoed to girlish song and laughter. Ethel shed no tears and uttered no complaints ; her smile was as winning as ever, but there was a shadow of a patient waiting in her eyes, as the memories of the past, its joys and sorrows, crowded upon her. Sometimes she would sit with clasped hands, on which Graham's ring sparkled, and gaze across the distant fields, her soft eyes shining with the lustre of unshed tears.

She devoted many hours of the day to the poor and afflicted, and often, in sunshine and in storm, could her little phaeton be seen wending its way to the miserable houses of the poor in Millford. Her sweet, beautiful face and winning manners cheered the dismal abodes which she entered ; the gentle charity which she extended to all, and sweet words of consolation which were ever ready, fell like balm

upon the broken-hearted, and her efforts to encourage the bereaved and reclaim the fallen were met with a ready response, and secured her the unbounded love and devotion of every one.

Little children would run out to meet her when they caught a glimpse of her graceful figure in its deep mourning robes; weary wives and mothers hastened to catch a smile from the fair young face, as she drove through their quiet streets, and strong, stalwart men treated her with a homage and a respect which was almost reverential.

"Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truth." Ethel had found her life-work, and was happy in it. The blessed hope of meeting Graham hereafter consoled her lonely, sorrowing heart; the brightness of earth had passed away, but the light of Heaven, of a glorious, never-ending eternity, dawned upon her chastened spirit.

"Be strong to *hope*, O Heart!
Though day is bright,
The stars can only shine
In the dark night.
Be strong, O Heart of mine!
Look toward the light!

"Be strong to *bear*, O Heart!
Nothing is vain;
Strive not, for life is care,
And God sends pain.
Heaven is above, and there
Rest will remain.

"Be strong to *love*, O Heart!
Love knows not wrong;
Didst thou love—creatures even,
Life were not long;
Didst thou love God in Heaven,
Thou wouldst be strong!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPRICE.

EARLY in June Tom Clayton received a letter from Kingsland, requesting his immediate presence in Liverpool to attend to important business transactions. Taking the earliest train, after the reception of the letter, he started for Millford. On arriving at the Hall, he was informed that no one was at home but Bessie, whom he found asleep in the hammock on the piazza. Stepping up softly, he leaned over the rosy sleeper, and imprinted a light kiss on her lips, which awoke her. Springing from the hammock, she exclaimed with joyful surprise :

" Oh Tom ! my darling boy, where did you drop from ? "

" The train dropped me at Millford, and I came to say ' good-by,' as I am going to Europe on Saturday."

" Going to Europe ! "

" Yes, little woman ; are you sorry ? "

" Why, of course I am," she answered, dolefully. " It is awfully lonely and stupid here this summer. Ethel is away all the time ; if she is not at Millford

visiting the poor people, she is busy cutting out work for poor women who come here for sewing, or answering papa's letters, or painting, or something else. And, O Tom! she does look so sad and lovely in her deep mourning; but she is so cheerful, one would never think she had suffered so much, except by the sorrowful look in her eyes."

"Poor Ethel!" said Tom, sadly. "I could have given my own life to save Graham's; she loved him so much."

"Hush! don't say that," said Bessie, impetuously.

"What difference would it have made with you?" demanded her cousin, somewhat astonished at the fierce tone in which she spoke.

"Not much, my dear; only I *am* so lonely up here. Why cannot you stay, instead of going to Liverpool?"

"When you opened your eyes and saw me, I presume you imagined that I had come up for the express purpose of playing the devoted to you all summer, eh?"

"Yes. I thought you'd take me some rides on horseback, and give me ever so many sails on the lake," she answered, pathetically.

"Well, Bessie Bunch, I shall only be gone until September, when I expect to return with Maud and Harold; but before I go, I want my Rose-bud to promise that she will be my little comforter for life some of these days."

"What nonsense you talk, Tom," said Bessie, pouting and reddening. "I shan't make any such promise at all."

"But you *shall* listen," replied her cousin, winding his arm around her waist; "tell me, Bessie, don't you love me a little?"

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't."

"Well, which perhaps is it?"

"That, sir, I shall not tell you."

"But, Bessie, you must."

"No, I musn't, if I don't choose to."

"If you won't promise to be my wife, won't you be my dear little *fiancée* while I am gone?"

"You're very absurd, Tom. If I became engaged to you, of course I'd have to marry you, and possibly I may fall in love with some one else before you come back, and you know what a shocking catastrophe that would be."

Tom was silent. He knew his little cousin liked him, but he did not know how much of what she said was sincere. Bessie saw his troubled look, and glancing up, said, coyly:

"Tom, have I vexed you?"

"Yes, you have. I did not think my Bessie would treat me so."

"Well, I'm sorry; but really, you must not talk to me in that way; *perhaps* you may when you come back," with a coquettish laugh.

"Thank you for even that meagre hope," giving her an embrace which nearly strangled her; "will you keep this picture for me while I am away?"

Bessie opened a little velvet case, which contained Tom's picture on one side, and a lock of his curly brown hair on the other.

Blushing rosily, she said in a subdued tone:

"Yes, Tom, of course I'll keep it. Here is a little tin-type of myself I had taken at Millford yesterday; would you like it?"

Tom looked at the picture with a half smile on his face. It was wretchedly taken, but the likeness was good. There were Bessie's laughing eyes and pouting lips and saucy, dimpled chin. Putting it in his pocket he said, quietly:

"I shall have a miniature taken of this when I am in London. A tin edition of my little Rose-bud is neither the prettiest nor the most convenient article to carry around in one's vest-pocket. Now don't you fall in love with any fellow while I am away."

"I told you I would not promise, and so I won't. But, Tom, what is William coming up with the buggy for?"

"He is going to take me to the depot. I must go back to town to-night; I only came up to say 'good-by.'"

"I can't bear to have you go so soon. Why cannot you wait until to-morrow?"

"Because the *Periere* sails the day after, and I have so many things to attend to I hardly know what to do first. I was determined to run up and see you, whatever happened. Say 'good-by' to uncle, Aunt Marion, and Ethel for me. Now,

little girlie, I must go, or I shall lose the train. I verily believe you are sorry to have me go, after all, you perverse little witch," he added, as the tears came into Bessie's eyes.

"Well, I *am* sorry, but I won't promise anything," she said, with a saucy smile, though the tears sparkled in her eyes.

"You are the most bewitching mixture of sugar and spice in the world," said Tom, catching her in his arms; giving her a suffocating squeeze and a kiss, he sprang into the carriage and drove off.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOME AGAIN.

OCTOBER had come, and the rounded knolls and shaded woodlawns of Tremount Hall were robed in their gorgeous autumn garb. Hill and valley and distant mountain peak were bathed in the soft purple mist of Indian summer. The warm sunshine flooded the golden landscape, brightening the brilliant tints of the forest trees which nodded and swayed like flaming torches, as the soft south wind swept by. The woodbines wound their scarlet way over hawthorn hedge and gray stone-wall, and crept like tongues of fire over the sturdy old cedars, drooping in graceful masses over the tree-tops, and clinging in heavy festoons to their dark-green branches. Brisk little squirrels sprang from branch to branch, and ran nimbly up and down the hickory trees, busily laying up their store of nuts and berries for the coming winter. Now and then could be heard the low, soft warbling of a wandering bird, resting on some friendly bough on its way to its southern home, bestowing in its last beautiful song a parting blessing on its native woods. The faint

rustling of the fallen leaves occasionally stirred by the passing breeze, and the loveliness and restful stillness of nature, seemed to breathe over all an atmosphere of perfect peace and repose.

It was on one of these beautiful autumn days, while Ethel and Bessie were dressing for their afternoon drive, that Mr. Tremount hastily entered his wife's dressing-room, exclaiming :

"Marion ! girls, where are you ! I have just received a telegram from Tom : the steamer arrived yesterday, and Maud, Harold, and Tom will be here in less than an hour. Bessie, run downstairs just as you are, and tell William to drive to the depôt as fast as possible. The telegram ought to have been received this morning."

Bessie sprang off to deliver her orders, and dropping one slipper on the stairs and the other in the hall, rushed out on the piazza in her little stocking-feet, and ordered the coachman, who had just driven up, to whip the horses and drive like the wind. This order he executed to the letter, judging from the condition of the animals on their arrival at the station, where they stood a few minutes before the train came in, panting and reeking with foam.

Ethel hurried to her room. Her heart throbbed wildly and her face worked painfully as she endeavored to still the despairing, agonizing thoughts which Maud's anticipated arrival had called up. Strength was given her in that trying

hour, and when she arose from her knees, a sweet, peaceful expression rested on her fair face.

An hour later the family gathered on the piazza to welcome the absent ones. Soon the sound of carriage wheels was heard down the road, and the horses sprang to the door. Tom sprang off the driver's box, and commenced to hug aunt, uncle, and cousins indiscriminately. As Mr. Kingsland lifted Maud from the carrirge, looking more beautiful and queenly than ever, a glad shout of welcome broke from the group of maids and men-servants, who had assembled on the lawn, from Hazelhurst and the Hall, to greet her.

"Williams, you can drive to the barn now," said Mr. Tremount to the coachman, after the first greetings were over.

"Wait one instant," said Kingsland, running down the steps; "we have some more baggage in here."

Opening the carriage door, he took a long, wriggling roll of lace and muslin from some one inside, and stepping up on the piazza, deposited a rosy, three-months-old baby in its grandmother's arms.

"Maud, Harold, you don't mean to say that this little fellow is really my grandson!" exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Tremount, wiping the happy tears from her eyes.

"Yes, indeed we do," said Kingsland, bending over wife and child with a fond smile.

"Do let me have him one instant," demanded Bessie, almost dislocating the young gentleman's

fat little arms in her efforts to hold him. "How funny it seems to think that Ethel and I are really the aunties of this precious little darling."

Taking the baby from her sister, Maud laid him in Ethel's arms, saying softly:

"Ethel, he shall be your boy too. We have named him Cecil Graham."

The tears sprang to Ethel's eyes, and she laid her face on the little one's dress to hide them.

"Thank you, Maudie!" she whispered, looking up presently with a bright smile through her tears. The baby crowed and laughed in her arms, and played with the diamond ring that glittered on her finger. A low, happy laugh escaped her lips, and some of her old playfulness returned, as she tossed him in her arms.

CHAPTER XXX.

"THE SHADOWS FLEE AWAY."

"ETHEL!" said Tom, as his cousin was going up the stairs a little while later with the baby in her arms, "if it is a possible thing for you to spare five minutes from that little chap, I'd like to be invited to your boudoir, if you will allow masculine presence within its sacred precincts."

"You are a privileged character, and always will be," said Ethel, giving little Cecil to Maud, and smilingly taking her cousin's arm.

Upon entering the cosey and elegant little apartment, Tom drew Ethel to a seat in the bay window. Everything about the room exhibited the artistic taste and skill of its owner. Near the long French window, which opened on to a small balcony, stood an easel, upon which rested a freshly executed painting of the cottage and boat-house at Seabright; sketches and studies peeped out of open portfolios, and beautiful pictures decorated the walls. In the vine-wreathed window at the the extremity of the room a pretty canary bird

was softly trilling in its golden cage, and books, pictures, and statuettes covered the tables and brackets which adorned the room. It was here that Ethel sought that solace for her lonely heart during the many sad hours that followed Graham's tragic death.

Seating himself beside her, he said tenderly :

" I brought something for you from Europe, Ethel, and I wanted you to see it alone. Shall I show it to you now ? "

Ethel trembled. She had a vague suspicion of what it could be, and watched with breathless suspense, as Tom, putting his hand into his vest-pocket, drew forth a velvet case. Touching a spring, the cover flew open, and Ethel looked upon Cecil Graham's face. Tom placed it in her hands, and then walked across the room to look at the picture on the easel. Ethel gazed with tearless eyes upon the handsome, speaking face, and seemed to devour every feature. She lingered longest at the calm, deep, earnest eyes which looked at her as though they knew the bitter sorrow which was constantly knawing at her heart. Suddenly, with a low wail of anguish, she clasped the miniature to her bosom, and burying her face in the cushions, burst into a passionate flood of tears. The very depths of her sorrow was stirred, and sob after sob shook her convulsively. The perfect self-control which she had exhibited during the excitement and agitation occasioned by Maud's arrival now forsook her, and her overburdened heart

found relief in tears. Tom watched her silently for some minutes, and then raising her head gently from the cushions, he said earnestly :

"O Ethel ! how I wish I could comfort you. Does it not say somewhere in this little Bible of yours, that God does not willingly afflict those that love him ? "

"Forgive me ; I ought not to forget His love for me. If it had not been for this precious little Bible of mine, and for believing that 'whom He loveth He chasteneth,' I think I should have lost my reason last fall."

"Do you know, dear, that the remembrance of your beautiful patience and sweet submission under this awful sorrow has been making a different man of me ? " said Tom, a manly flush rising to his brow as he partially turned his face from her.

"O Tom, do you really mean it, do you mean that—that you feel as I do ? " cried Ethel, quickly.

"Yes, I do mean that, Ethel. The recollection of your sweet, cheerful face has been with me all the months I have been away ; and, notwithstanding my great love for our Bessie, which perhaps may make me your brother some of these days, there has been a deeper, holier influence emanating from you, dear, which has turned my thoughts in a higher direction, and I now feel that I may be walking the same road with you."

Ethel forgot her own grief, and tears of joy sprang to her eyes, as she silently, almost reveren-

tially, stood up and kissed his forehead. Then placing her hand on his shoulder, she said, in a tone of thrilling solemnity:

"If the salvation of your soul has been the result of Cecil's death, God is my witness when I tell you, dear cousin, that I do not regret that he died. This is the first thing which has reconciled me to his death."

As she stood before him with her hand on his bended head, she looked like a beautiful young priestess bestowing a benediction. Both were silent for some time. Tom's bowed head rested on a table in front of him, while Ethel, standing by the window, gazed with rapt eyes across the distant mountain range, as if peering into the unknown heights beyond. A painful smile rested on her face, which was radiant with a light not of earth, and her whole figure seemed to be transformed into some fair being of heavenly mould.

At length, Tom said quietly:

"I have another picture of Cecil in my room. I had it painted life-size from an old photograph for you. Shall I get it for you now?"

Ethel assented, and Tom left the room. As the door closed, she looked long and lovingly at the beautiful miniature in her hands, and then kissing it softly, she closed the lid as her cousin entered, carrying in his arms a large, handsomely framed painting.

"Now, Ethel, I want you to assist me," said Tom, placing one or two hassocks on a chair, and

preparing to mount. "Remove the mantle ornaments, please, while I tie on this cord."

Ethel did as she was told, and the painting was soon suspended. It was an exquisitely painted portrait, and perfect in every feature. As Ethel looked up to the noble face smiling down upon her, an almost happy smile brightened her own, and she felt that the barrier which Death had drawn between her and Cecil was but a shadow which was becoming fainter and fainter as the days passed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DARBY AND JOAN.

AFTER luncheon, the following afternoon, Tom led Bessie off to the knoll, and making her sit down at the foot of an old tree, threw himself on the grass, saying :

"Now, Bessie Bunch, I want to know if you have kept your promise?"

"What promise, Tom?"

"Why, the promise you made me three months ago before I sailed for Europe."

"You shabby boy! I never made you a promise at all, and you remember it very well."

"Yes, you did. This picture is tantamount to a promise, and I shall hold you to it."

"What picture? Do you mean that horrid little tin-type I gave you," she returned scornfully. "If *that* represents a promise, I wouldn't give that," (snapping her fingers) "for it!"

"But I don't mean that 'horrid little tin-type,' as you call it, at all. I mean this one," and he held before her eyes a superb ivory miniature of herself, perfect in feature and coloring, even to the little dimpled chin and saucy curl of the coral lip.

"But I did not give you *that*," said Bessie, looking down and digging vigorously into the ground with a stick.

"Come, Bessie, be sensible, do," said Tom, pleadingly.

"What else am I? I'm not insane, I hope?"

"You'll drive *me* so before long," said Tom, savagely.

"It wouldn't be convenient for me if you were to lose your senses just now; so what do you want?"

"That picture has been with me every minute since I have been away. Won't you let me keep the original for a lifetime?"

"Do you mean the tin-type," said Bessie, teasingly.

"No," replied Tom, crossly. "I mean you."

"Well, why didn't you say so before?"

"I did."

"No, you did not" (decidedly).

"Bessie, you are very contradictory and disagreeable."

"A pretty thing for a *gentleman* to say who is asking a girl to be his wife," retorted Bessie, indignantly.

Both were silent for some time. Tom amused himself whipping off the tops of the short spears of grass with his cane, while Bessie hummed in a low tone the *Three Little Kittens*, and dug her long stick into the ground as if her existence depended upon her poking it in as far as it would go.

Tom broke the uncomfortable pause first, and laying his hand on Bessie's, said earnestly:

"Why won't you answer me directly, Bessie?"

"Because you have not asked me if I had become engaged while you were away."

"Well, are you?"

"Yes," she answered, throwing away her stick, and turning her scarlet face from him.

"To whom?" he asked with white, trembling lips.

"Will you promise not to breathe a word about it, if I tell you?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, no one knows anything about it but myself, not even Ethel."

"What is his name?" demanded Tom, with feverish impatience.

"What are you in such a desperate hurry for," she answered provokingly.

Catching hold of her hand, he replied angrily:

"Bessie, you must tell me. Why will you torture me so?"

"Then let go of my hand; you hurt me."

"Will you tell me, if I do?"

"Yes, but, O Tom, I can't," she cried as he released her hand.

"But you *must*," he returned, passionately repossessing himself of it.

"Must! Well then I *won't*, and if you tease me any more I shall go to the house."

"You shall not stir one step from this place until

you have answered me ; you said you would if I released your hand," he returned sternly.

"Well, I have changed my mind, and you know it is a woman's prerogative to change it if she pleases," she said defiantly, though she grew a shade paler as she glanced at his white face.

"Bessie, stand up ; I will not submit to this nonsense any longer. You have kept me in suspense quite long enough." Taking her face between his hands, he looked into her eyes as if he would read her very soul.

Bessie looked confused, and blushed rosily under his searching gaze, then she whispered in her pretty, wilful way :

"Tom, I said I wouldn't tell you who he is, and so I won't; but if you will be good and not get angry, I will show you his picture. Will you ? "

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently.

"Well, then, don't squeeze my face, and let go my hand."

Obeying the commands of the perverse little lady, he watched her anxiously as she unfastened a locket from the golden chain around her neck, and held it before his astonished gaze. For an instant he was bewildered ; for in a tiny mirror he beheld the reflected image of his own handsome face. Recovering his scattered senses, he caught the blushing girl to his heart, and exclaimed in an ecstasy of joy :

"O Bessie, you artful little witch, you naughty darling, how could you deceive me so ? "

"Well, Tom," she answered, contentedly laying her head on his shoulder, and looking up smilingly into his kind face, "you see you were so determined that I should not be anybody else's wife but yours, that I thought I would teach you a lesson on the utter uselessness of man's boasted superiority of will when combated by a woman."

"But you did not have your own way this time, did you?"

"Indeed I did," she answered demurely. "Why, my darling boy, I have been engaged to that young gentleman with the blank expression of countenance in my locket ever since I was old enough to run about."

"And pray did he offer himself at that tender age?" said Tom smiling.

"No, you wicked man; and you needn't laugh either. I opened my juvenile heart to him when I used to trot about with little red shoes on, and he has been growing larger and larger there ever since, and now he is so big he occupies every bit of room in it. But, Tom, you are laughing at me!"

"Well, it is because my Rose-bud has made me so happy, after tantalizing me so unmercifully, that I don't know whether I stand on my head or my heels."

"For goodness' sake, don't stand on your head," said Bessie in alarm, as her young lover seemed inclined to perform some gymnastic feat to celebrate their happy bethrothal. "There come Ethel and

Harold to tell us dinner is ready. Oh, *do* be sen-sensible, Tom, and act as if nothing had hap-pened."

"Well, come here, Miss Dignity," said Tom, drawing her hand within his arm. "Screw up your mouth, little woman, and look as proper as possible, and we will march to the house as se-dately as Darby and Joan of blessed memory."

CHAPTER XXXII.

HAZELHURST.

A FEW days after their arrival, Maud and Kingsland went over to their charming home at Hazelhurst to live.

One evening as Maud was putting little Cecil to bed, Kingsland entered the nursery unperceived, and stood watching his beautiful wife as she sat in her low chair in the soft evening twilight, rocking her baby to sleep. Lifting the sleeping little one into his crib, she kissed his baby cheek and turned to meet the smiling face of her husband.

"Why, Harold, I did not hear you come in!" she whispered, as he drew her to the window.

"No, darling, I know you did not, and I had no desire to disturb the pretty tableau you made by making myself heard."

"Did you have a pleasant ride?"

"Yes. Ethel looks superbly on horseback. I never saw a woman ride better. At her request, I had the saddle changed before we started, and she rode Saladin while I took your old Selim."

"You don't mean she rode *Satan*, as Tom calls your horse!"

"She did indeed, and rode him magnificently

too. William told me she tried him for the first time last summer, and was nearly thrown. She finally conquered him, however, and since then has remained thorough mistress of the situation. As soon as the old fellow saw her this afternoon, he whinnied, and rubbed his nose against her shoulder, and seemed to endure her caresses with a degree of pleasure that quite astonished me, for he has always resented such familiarity from every one but myself. She has perfect control over the fiery creature, and he appears to recognize her authority completely."

"I half suspect that the reason why she was determined to conquer him was because Cecil admired him so much," said Maud. "Tom rode him once last spring, Bessie told me, and used spurs. The consequence was, he went over Saladin's head rather unceremoniously; and after that escapade, he dubbed the horse Satan. Why do you not give him to Ethel?"

"I made up my mind to that effect this afternoon after I mounted her and saw how perfectly fitted he was to her. She managed him with an ease and grace which one seldom finds possessed by a woman when riding such a mettlesome steed as Saladin. But Maudie, does it seem pleasant to be home once more?"

"Indeed it does, Harold, and you cannot tell how happy I am," she replied, looking up with a loving smile to the face bent down to her. "It seems so delightful to be home again, and our

own home too. Should you not think I ought to be happy with our little treasure over there in the crib, and you, my darling husband, to love and take care of me?"

"You are a very precious little woman," said Kingsland, drawing her closer to him and kissing her sweet, upturned face.

"Do you remember the interesting scene at the bridge that Sunday afternoon?" said Maud, with a quizzical smile, after some moments' silence.

"I have a most vivid recollection of the event, madam," answered her husband, drawing down his mustache with an attempt to look miserable.

"Well, I really believe if you had left me then and gone to Siberia, or South Africa, or anywhere else—"

"Charming places of banishment, particularly the latter country," interrupted Kingsland.

"I was going to remark," she resumed, "if you *had* gone to those barbarous lands, you would have forgotten me most effectually, and I should not have been the happy woman I am now."

"But I did not go, and I hadn't the slightest intention of leaving you for Mr. Ashton's edification."

"Hush! I won't hear his name mentioned."

"But if I *had* gone, pray why should I have forgotten you, little wife?"

"Why, because *l'appètit vient en mangeant.* Love requires proximity of the object to thrive and grow."

"That may be true in most cases, Maudie, but my love was too deeply rooted ever to allow time or distance to weaken it."

"Ours was rather a queer sort of love-making after all," said Maud, looking dreamily out of the window, "and that old kitchen was not the most romantic place in the world to offer one's self in, was it?"

"It suited me entirely, and I shall always cherish the old room in my memory, and the caramels too, for the assistance they gave me on that eventful night. You looked so dangerously lovely, standing there in the firelight, confronting me with your angry, beautiful eyes, that I felt more determined than ever to have you, notwithstanding you defied me so haughtily."

"You did not appear to be very much daunted by my behavior, judging from the result."

"'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady,'" said Kingsland smiling.

"Actually, Harold, you overwhelmed me so completely by the unceremonious manner in which you took possession of me, that I had not sense enough to utter one word of remonstrance at your audacity."

"Some citadels have to be taken by storm, others reduced to submission by famine or wearisome warfare."

"Which was my case?" said Maud, with a shy laugh.

"I annihilated your fortress in one final attack,

though I must confess I did make some rather unsuccessful attempts before. I think, however, I should have encountered more rebuffs than I did, had it not been for Ethel's manœuvres in my behalf. As it was, my courtship with your ladyship was sufficiently stormy to make me appreciate my good fortune when I finally obtained entire possession of you. To tell the truth," he added, looking fondly down on the rosy face resting on his breast, "I did not feel entirely sure of my prize until the ring was on—

> "'The "Wilt thou?" answer'd, and again
> The "Wilt thou?" ask'd, till out of twain
> Your sweet "I will" had made us one."

"I did try your love and patience abominably, but I fancy you loved me all the better after all, for my perverseness, did you not?" said Maud.

"I don't think I loved your *perverseness* particularly, for it kept me in a constant state of ebullition."

"You certainly did not show in your manner what your real feelings were for me. I used to think you so cold, and indifferent, and haughty, that I tried my best to steel my heart against you, while I was actually starving for your love all the while."

"You proved somewhat of an actress yourself in concealing your love for me, my 'faultless Maud,' now," answered her husband, smoothing her hair.

"I heard Tom tell mamma this morning that Bessie, Ethel, and I were the most perverse trio of sisters he ever knew, read, or heard of in his life. You know he is engaged to Bessie, and I expect he had rather a troublesome task in wooing his rebellious little *fiancée*. He politely informed mamma, for my edification evidently—for I was standing near them playing with baby, that she was as wilful and refractory as I, and it was well he had secured her in time, for there was no telling what she would become by the time she arrived at my mature age. Complimentary, was he not?"

"It seems to be the family characteristic," he replied, smiling. "That young gentleman over yonder is waking up, dearie, so come downstairs to the library," he added, as a little cry from the crib attracted his attention. Slipping her arm through his, they walked downstairs together; and Maud had just taken a low seat by her husband's chair, when Tom and Bessie walked into the room.

"I declare! this is a pretty picture of domestic felicity; you only need that little chap upstairs to make it complete," exclaimed Tom, coolly regarding them with his hands in his pockets.

"Take a chair, Bessie, and sit down," said Kingsland.

"Thank you, not to-night. Tom has been in a sentimental mood this whole blessed day, so I thought a walk over here would cure him of the

fit, but the moonlight has made him more hopelessly silly than ever."

"Mrs. Clayton, there is a lecture in store for you when we return home." Turning to Maud, he added, laughingly:

"We thought we would just 'drop in' upon you this evening after the manner of *Paul Pry*, and see whether you and Kingsland were up to your old tricks again. But I perceive you have given up the frivolities of your youth. I have some news for you; what do you think it is?"

"I cannot imagine. You are such an erratic genius, there is no knowing what you will do for two consecutive minutes," said Maud.

"Thanks. Spicy as ever, I see. Well, madam, Bessie and I are going to be married in December, and Ethel is going to Europe with your father and mother the month following."

"*You* going to be married!" cried Maud, in amazement.

"And pray why not? You and Kingsland set us such an excellent example in getting married in a hurry, that Bessie and I are going to follow suit."

"When did you decide upon this astounding arrangement?"

"Last evening. Ethel is not strong, and Uncle Ralph thinks a change will do her good. I don't wish Bessie to go, for fear of her falling in love with some black-eyed Italian count or Spanish grandee, who would doubtless turn out to be a bar-

ber or gentlemanly valet, so I have decided that she shall marry me and stay at home."

"*You* have decided indeed! As a general thing it takes two to make a bargain, sir! I shall not marry you unless I please," said Bessie pouting, as she saw a smile on her brother-in-law's face. "Really, Harold, he is beginning to rule me already with a high and mighty hand."

"That is just the kind of management you ladies like," remarked Tom, coolly. "Besides, you are such a very prickly little rose-bud, that it requires some skill and firmness in handling you."

"If I prick before I'm married, our 'dear five hundred friends' will certainly declare us to be a very prickly *pair* afterwards," she retorted, escaping from him and sitting beside Maud on the sofa.

"What is the matter with Ethel?" asked Kingsland, as he and Tom walked into the dining-room to enjoy a smoke.

"I think she over-exerts herself. She is busy constantly with 'her people,' as she calls those families whom she visits at Millford. They perfectly adore her, and, indeed I don't wonder at it. She moves among them like a lovely young princess."

"Her cheerfulness and unselfishness are remarkable. I am sure she is a blessing to us all," said Kingsland, warmly. "Maud said this evening that she always felt happier and better after one of Ethel's little visits here."

"Her gentleness has done much to soften my

little Bessie," replied Tom, looking tenderly at the bright young face in the other room. "Her influence is felt everywhere. Uncle Ralph would hardly know what to do without her. She writes and answers half his business letters, besides attending to all her other duties."

"Do you think she will ever marry Temple? He appears to be as devoted as ever to her."

"Never! Ethel's heart was buried in Greenwood a year ago. I don't think she will ever marry."

"Tom, dear, it is nearly ten o'clock, and we must hurry home. Mamma won't know what has become of us," said Bessie, entering the dining-room.

"She will probably think we have gone off to *Gretna Green*, and thus saved her the trouble of getting up a wedding for us," answered Tom, throwing away his cigar.

"By the way, Maud," he remarked, following the sisters into the hall, "you ought to thank your —I was not going to say stars, at all, Bessie,"—as a reproving voice from the piazza told him to "be ashamed of himself."

"I was going to remark that you ought to thank the planets and me for that good-looking husband of yours. If it had not been for my disinterestedly playing the decoy duck to entrap Kingsland the night of that ever-to-be-remembered caramel party, you would not be the happy woman you are now."

"Do hurry, Tom," called Bessie, impatiently tapping her foot on the piazza.

"I foresaw with my prophetic eye," he resumed, coolly ignoring the pretty wrath of his little *fiancée*, "the day when a matrimonial peace would reign between you, and you would utter with tears in your eyes, and hearts full of happiness, my rather trite and oft-repeated quotation that

"'All's well that ends well.'"

THE END.

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